# fantastic

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APRIL, 1954

A ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLICATION

35¢

THE FINEST FANTASY FICTION

By

WILLIAM LINDSAY GRESHAM

WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

ROBERT BLOCH

JEROME BIXBY

**A PORTFOLIO**

**by Louis Priscilla**

**BEWARE THE FURY** *By Theodore Sturgeon*

# LOUIS PRISCILLA

•

## a portfolio

*Louis Priscilla is one of the foremost commercial artists in the present-day field. An instructor at the Art Student's League in New York City, his cartoons have appeared in almost every major magazine on the stands. Priscilla is a master of the outré and the bizarre. He is a great admirer of Heinrich Kley, and the Kley influence is apparent in a great deal of his work.* *The portfolio is continued on page 70.*

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# fantastic

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# ACCORDING TO *YOU*...

## Overcover Agents

Sir:

The use of the small illustration and neat type layout on your recent covers make it the most attractive science-fantasy magazine on the stands — or for that matter one of the most attractive magazines of any classification. I can read your publication on the train now and not have my seatmate give me the lifted eyebrow.

MILLER T. RANSOME

Los Angeles, Calif.

Sir:

It's not that I mind the small cover painting, but must the subject matter be so uninteresting? . . .

RALPH PETORI

Detroit, Mich.

Sir:

The March cover missed being a cartoon by half an inch . . . But the choice of color was magnificent. . . .

O. L. SMITH

Atlanta, Ga.

## Go, West

Sir:

After two fine stories by Wallace West, I suppose it was only natural for him to fall flat on his face with "The Disenchanted." When I compare it with "Eddie for Short" I could cry!

MRS. LAURA SALK

Lincoln, Nebr.

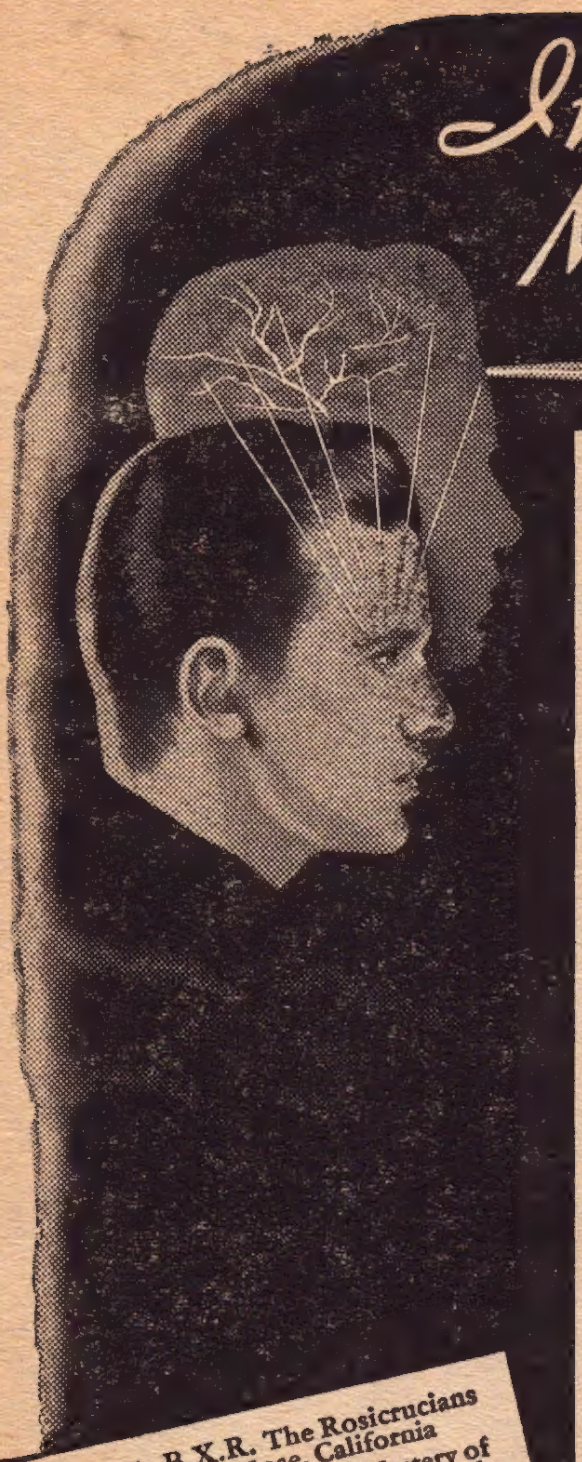
Sir:

Surely you don't have to buy *every* story Wallace West writes! How a man who wrote so sensitive and heart-warming a story as "Eddie for Short" could have turned out the piece of decadence titled "The Disenchanted" is a mystery known only to him.

GUY KINGMAN

New York, N. Y.

# In Your Mind's Eye



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Illustrator: Ernest Schroeder

# The Letter

By DORIS E. KAYE

*John Jones was just what his name implied — a nice little guy making an ordinary living in an ordinary way. Then some long-nosed joker sent him that letter; that mean, low, busybody's letter that could only turn him into a spy — a husband watching his own wife, the woman he'd sworn to love and trust. This started him on a trip completely out of this world. And one thing was certain — he would never be quite the same again.*

IT WAS the kind of hazy morning that promised to be a scorcher, with a gray, heavy mist hanging low over the Sound. When the TV weather man had drawn a picture of it the night before, John Jones set himself an early alarm — "to beat the heat," as he put it, in getting down to his office in midtown Manhattan.

But a much too good pocket-book mystery had kept him reading far past midnight, his usual hour to douse the light. It wasn't until all corpses were cold and the murderer safe in the hands of The Law that the head of the house at Number 18 Hickory Lane slept the sleep of the innocent — while the alarm clock droned to exhaustion.

At best, that wasn't a tough thing to do; Jones had a habit of keeping the clock muffled in the drawer of his night-table. He didn't think it fair to get Alice up that early, especially when all he ever wanted for breakfast was a glass of prepared orange juice and a cup of equally prepared coffee. Forty-one years of bachelorhood had made him an expert at soloing for breakfast; there was no point in changing that after six months

of marriage to a new bride of twenty-four. A day hadn't passed since that he didn't want to pinch himself to make sure all this actually was happening to *him*. Old Jonesy, forty-two and balding — lucky enough to convince a pretty young doll like Alice that death alone would them part!

"Wow! Did I oversleep!" Jones growled at himself as he squinted a heavy eyelid at the window and pulled the reluctant clock out of the drawer. The sun had already broken through most of the thick haze and patterned the soft green broadloom in venetian-blind strippings. A quick glance at the other twin bed assured him that Alice was still deep in her own private worlds and so he swung out from under the thin summer sheet with husbandly caution. Well, he'd be late again, but if the heat kept up he couldn't get much work done anyway. Wedded bliss had made John Jones far more docile in the face of life's minor irritations than he had ever been before.

A sharp cold shower, a clean shave and a wardrobe of fresh, cool and sweet-smelling laundry sent him down to the kitchen in high spirits. While the water boiled for his coffee he made the rounds of the downstairs windows, closing the blinds against the day's sun, then stepped out to scoop the newspaper off the front porch. Fifteen minutes later he backed the car out of the garage and was on his way to the station — one of those typically verdant little oases that flower along the banks of the New Haven and Hartford tracks in Suburbia, U.S.A. The daily pattern was unchanged, except for one thing. This day the mailman met him just as he was turning the car into the road.

"H'ya, Mike!" Jones called brightly. "All mine, or does it all go to Mrs. Jones? Guess you'd better slip hers in the slot; I'll take the rest. I'm pretty late today."

Strolling over to the car, the postman thumbed through the four pieces of mail addressed to Number 18. "All for you, Mr. Jones, except for a new laundry circular. Got one of those for every lady along the route."

"Okay. Thanks, Mike," Jones said, taking his mail. "Let her have that laundry thing. She reads the fool stuff like a timetable, afraid she'll miss the boat on some two-cent bargain!" The note of pride was unmistakable. No matter what the content of the comment, it always added up to "clever little gal, that wife of mine!"

Still smiling, Jones shoved the mail into his pocket, put his foot on the accelerator and started off for the station.

Comfortably seated on the shady side of the 9:23, Jones opened his letters. The first rated only a

quick run-through. His local political club was requesting his dutiful presence at a meeting of "utmost importance." Probably wind up in a good poker game. Alice was big about things like that; she always seemed to find something to do around the house when he wanted an evening with the boys. The second was a short note from Tony Markham, one of his old college buddies. Expected to be in town the week after next and would like to meet Alice. Fine! He'd ask him up to dinner. Jones had deliberately saved the third envelope for the last. Something about it provoked his curiosity. The handwriting was almost childish — an uneven scrawl. Jones flipped it over. No return address.

"What kind of a gag *is* this?" he thought. He tore the envelope loosely.

The customary salutory endearment was missing. "To John Jones," it began. "I consider it my duty to tell you this." Jones straightened up in his seat as his eyes dropped down to the bottom of the page. No signature. Beginning at the top again, he read on.

*"To John Jones. I consider it my duty to tell you this. Strange things have been happening at your home while you are away each day. Men are visiting your wife, Mr. Jones. They drive up to your door, stay anywhere from ten minutes to two hours and then leave. The last one always leaves about an hour before you get home. I won't say anymore. The rest is up to you. But as a respectable member of a respectable community, I think you should know this. Draw your own conclusions."*

With an almost suffocating pounding in his throat and his lips pressed tight back against his teeth, Jones re-read the note. He cupped it closer in his hands, and looked up, his eyes darting sharply from one passenger to another. After the quick, horrifying realization of the contents, he wanted to make sure that the whole train wasn't reading over his shoulder. A message like that seemed to scream out loud.

His hands shaking, he folded the letter back into its envelope and stuffed it into his pocket. He needed a cigarette. But more than that, he needed to get away from what suddenly loomed up at him as a train-full of prying eyes. The fact that every face was burrowed deep in its own newspaper didn't connect at all. He just couldn't sit there. Although the train was still twenty-five minutes from Grand Central station, Jones rushed out to the car platform, fumbled nervously for a cigarette and pressed his body close to the dusty window. The letter seemed

to rub against a network of loose nerve ends jutting out from his trembling chest.

Like a drowning man whose entire life unfolds in that one interminable moment before eternity, the life of John and Alice Jones (nee Brady) swept before his shattered mind. . . .

Going to that seance on a miserable, rainy night eight months before had been pretty much of a gag. One of the men at the office had suggested Jones try it, just for kicks. All you did was write your initials on a piece of paper, drop it into a box held by a sleazy-looking blonde who stood at the door and collected your fifty cents, concentrate on the question you wanted answered by the "Swami" and then wait. The room itself, on the first floor of an old red-brick office building, was no more than twenty feet square, the walls hung with faded green brocade drapes, a low dais at the far end. About ten rows of squeaky wooden folding chairs completed the appointments. Jones felt like such a fool even being there that he didn't dare look around at the rest of the small congregation. If there happened to be someone there he knew, he'd never live it down! He first spotted Alice during the "sermon." Yes, he remembered it started with a weird sort of sermon, something about an "all-seeing Power" who guided your destinies if you truly and sincerely believed in Him. "Let no other thought cross your mind but that one which troubles you, and He will answer and guide you."

Jones found himself concentrating over a new contract he was working on, but promptly laughed it off when he took another good look at the guy on the dais. Instead he decided to put his attention on a most provocative profile in the next row. It was framed in shoulder-length, soft brown hair that turned in at the nape of the neck with careful carelessness, and from time to time he was able to catch a glimpse of a more than lovely face.

Jones' question, of course, went unanswered; and if the girl's did too, he had no way of knowing it. Even when the Swami called out the initials, the bearer just listened without giving any sign of recognition.

When the session ended, to Jones' intense relief, the congregation filed out silently, the girl directly ahead of him. He remembered how pleased he was at the time to find that she was small in stature. Not a tall man himself, Jones was always conscious of height in others, especially of women.

He was walking a few feet behind her as they descended the outer stairs. On the last step Alice tripped and Jones rushed to her aid. When she tried to stand up it

was obvious she had hurt her ankle. So, with a tenderness that gave him unexpected pleasure, he carried the girl into his car and home to her neat one-room apartment in the East 50's.

They were married just one month later. Alice was an orphan with no relatives or close friends in New York, and Jones' family, back in Everett, Washington, couldn't make the trip east. So the ceremony was a quiet, business-like one at the Municipal Court Building. Jones knew little about Alice's job — she told him she was an expediter for a firm of electronic engineers — but since they planned on moving to the suburbs immediately after their honeymoon, she was giving that up to become a full-time housewife. That suited Jones fine! He had always wanted a home and now, more than ever, he wanted the wife to go with it.

The train was burrowing through the Park Avenue tunnel when John Jones came to the end of his personal flashback. Through it all lurked the persistent, nagging realization that he really knew very little about Alice! Who was she? Where had she come from? She was still only a kid. Kids did crazy things.

An impatient line of commuters coaxing him off the train woke Jones to the realization that he was in the city. Walking through the station to the Madison Avenue exit, he felt like a Zombie adrift in space, swollen far beyond his size with the tortured questions that festered inside him.

"Good morning, Mr. Jones," said his secretary. "Oh!" she added quickly, "aren't you feeling well?"

Jones stared at her belligerently. "Why?"

The girl backed away. This wasn't like him. When she spoke again her eyes were lowered and her voice softer. "Why, nothing, Mr. Jones. It's just that you're so pale!"

Jones bit hard on his lip. "I must be crazy!" he thought, tossing his hat on the clothes rack. "What could *she* know about this? Why snap at *her?*"

Aloud, and somewhat apologetically he added, "I'm sorry, Miss Riley. Guess you're right; I'm not feeling so good today. No calls, please. You take whatever comes in and cancel any appointments."

The office mail had been opened and laid out neatly on the top of his desk. He tried to read through it but it was no use. The words blurred and nothing made much sense. All he could see was "Alice — Alice — Alice —" and a stag line at the door of his bedroom. He jabbed his head into his fists, his nails digging hard into his glossy pink scalp, his eyes pressed tight against the torturing picture.

This was stupid! He just couldn't sit there driving himself out of his mind. *He had to find out!*

With a decision reached, he felt calmer now than he had for the past hour. "I think I'd better get some air," he said to Miss Riley as he went for his hat. "Might even stop in at the doctor. You'd better say I'm gone for the day." He wouldn't tell her he was going home. Alice might call and that would tip her off.

"Take care of yourself, Mr. Jones," his secretary said with genuine concern. "You really don't look right at all. And don't worry; I'll take care of everything."

"Thank you, my dear," he said absently. "I'm sure you will."

The outer door closed behind him.

The train carried only a handful of passengers. Jones found a seat in the smoker without any trouble. He made an effort to re-read the letter but gave it up when sight of the envelope brought back the pounding in his throat. He figured it would be better to concentrate on a plan.

Walking over to the parking lot for his car, he kept his head lowered so as not to have to greet anyone. But the few people around the station were all on the New York side; mostly women going in town to shop. He got into the car and rode off.

Their home was the last in the Lane — a gently winding street that was part of a fairly new development about five hundred feet from the Sound. The young trees planted five years before had thrived, giving some shade and a degree of permanence to the setting. Neatly trimmed hedges outlined each lot. Alice had chosen the house herself, even though he had pointed out at the time that it was pretty remote. The bus line was four blocks away and he needed the car every day. They still couldn't afford two, like most of his neighbors. But Alice didn't mind. She loved the house, he loved Alice, and things equal to each other added up to the down payment.

It was unwise to park too close, so he left the car on the next street and walked the distance to within a hundred feet of Number 18, taking his sentry post behind one of the higher hedges across the road. The family were away for the summer and he knew he wouldn't be noticed.

He sat down on the grass and waited.

Not long afterward, a sound brought him quickly to his feet. But it was only a grocery truck, making a delivery at the other end of the Lane. Twenty minutes later he saw a dark green sedan turn into his driveway. Jones spread the foliage and watched a

large man, dressed in a nondescript dark suit get out of the car, reach back for a heavy, square package and walk to the front door. Alice answered the bell, gave the man a quick smile of recognition, and they disappeared into the house. Jones waited. Half an hour later the stranger came out, without the package, got back into the car and drove away. An hour later practically the same process was repeated. This time the vehicle was a small black panel truck. It bore neither trade name nor insignia. Two men got out of the front seat, unlocked the doors and pulled out a large steel crate. Apparently Alice was expecting them. Before they had a chance to ring the bell she was at the front door.

"Better take that one through the back, boys," she called pleasantly.

They carried it up the driveway and disappeared through the side door. It was almost another hour before this pair was out and away — without the crate.

"That guy must be nuts!" Jones thought, recalling his nameless informer. His confidence was beginning to return. "Alice must be surprising me with something she's been buying. That's all it is! Damn nosey neighbors!"

It was past lunch time now, and his stomach was beginning to complain. Debating the advisability of calling the whole deal off, grabbing some lunch in the village and going back to the office took another ten minutes. He reached into his pocket for the time-table just as another car hummed down the Lane. This was a big, sleek job — with driver to match. No parcel.

His heart began pounding again. No, he couldn't leave; he had to see this thing out. In about forty minutes the visitor left. Alice walked out to the car with him and they seemed to have a few words of an obviously pleasant conversation before he drove away.

The procession lasted all day. They were always men: some alone, some in pairs. A few carried packages. All were neatly dressed and personally welcomed by his wife. By four o'clock Jones had enough. Every bone in his body ached, his head throbbed and a nauseous hunger racked his stomach. He went back to the car and drove to his favorite bar near the station. It was still too early to meet anyone and he needed a drink. Besides, he didn't want to meet anyone. He'd have a couple of fast ones and tell Alice he decided to knock off a little earlier because of the heat. A phone call to the office assured him she hadn't called there all day.

He felt a little steadier with the drinks under his belt and turned back to Number 18 Hickory Lane.

"Hello darling!" his wife greeted him, kissing him lightly. "Ah-hah!

Baby's had a nip of his bottle, hasn't he?" she laughed, as the unmistakable flavor of good bourbon rubbed off on her lips. There was no censure in her voice, just amusement.

"Okay, you caught me!" Jones answered tersely while he managed to avoid looking directly at her. This "act" was going to be even tougher to disguise than the bourbon! He sat down heavily in his chair — a red leather job she had bought especially for his comfort. God, but his legs ached! Must have been that business of squatting on the grass all day. "I made an earlier train — the city was really brutal today — so I decided to air-condition myself in Joe's place before I scorched up the house. What you just got, my pet, was the memory of two fast ones!"

"Good for you, baby. Think nothing of it. I'd have been shocked to death if you came in any earlier, anyway." Then, quickly, she added, "I mean I just got out of the shower myself, and you know how disconcerting it can be to hear the door open when you're running around in nothing flat!"

Jones attempted a smile. Damn right she'd have been shocked.

Alice was still talking. "But how about a wee nip now, with your Truly Beloved? I could stand a drink myself. Only, if you don't mind, darling, I'll make mine gin. Bourbon's too heavy for me in this weather." She lifted his feet up off the floor and set them on the matching red leather ottoman. "Come on there, fella, off with those hot, heavy shoes! I'll get your straw slippers and then we'll both get beautifully poluted. Sound like a good idea?"

"Okay, honey. You mix 'em and we'll fix 'em. I'll just close my eyes for a minute until you're ready with the grog."

The moment Alice left the room Jones' eyes darted across every inch of it, including the ceiling. Nothing had changed. Nothing missing, nothing added. Soon Alice returned with a tray of drinks, a can of peanuts and a a dish of his favorite cocktail crackers.

"There now, darling," she said, setting it on the coffee table. "You'll feel better after this."

"Maybe," he agreed, picking up his glass. "Well, Mrs. Jones, what kind of a day did *you* have?" He thought his voice sounded nonchalant enough, but he still didn't trust his eyes.

"Oh, nothing very exciting, Johnny. It was too hot to do much, so I just read most of the day. Fixed my stocking drawer, but that didn't take long. And oh, I did a terrific job on my nails. How do you like it?" She displayed her hands like a magazine ad. "Didn't have the energy to sit through a manicure in the village."

"Very nice," he conceded, looking but not quite seeing. "Anybody stop by? Sometimes I think it must be pretty damn dull for you, stuck way out here all day long."

"Oh no, darling! I love every minute of it! Nobody bothered me, no callers, no phone calls. I just took it easy and wallowed in the solitude! You know, Johnny, I'm afraid you're going to wind up with a very fat and lazy wife by the time she's forty. Do you mind?"

"You? Not a chance!" Jones answered, a little more sharply than he expected to. But a quick glance assured him Alice hadn't noticed. She was still too busy admiring her fingernails while the rest of her was curled up comfortably in one corner of the bright chintz sofa.

"How was your day?" she asked.

"Pretty rough. I'd rather not even talk about it."

"Then we won't, darling. Besides, I think you need some nourishment. You know what I have for you for dinner tonight? A great big luscious lobster salad! That sound good?"

"Fine! Let's eat."

Dinner went off uneventfully, with some small talk about the men's club meeting, the patch of grass that wouldn't grow on the shady side of the house, and a new refrigerator that makes cubes without a tray. In his preoccupation with the day's happenings, Jones forgot completely about his classmate's proposed visit to New York. The meal over, he suggested that Alice watch television while he looked into the business of weatherproofing the house "so that I'll know what those robbers are charging me for when I get them in here." Alice agreed readily as she settled back on the sofa and Jones started for the attic.

On the way up he stopped in their bedroom and the guest room, quietly and methodically opening all closets and dresser drawers. Nothing that hadn't been there a day, a week, a month before. The attic was equally as unrevealing. All they kept there anyway were their two trunks and a half-dozen pieces of small luggage. He opened everything, and found nothing.

On the way to the basement, Alice called to him. "Aren't you through yet, Johnny? There's a good show coming up next."

"Be there in a minute, honey. Have to check on those leaky windows downstairs. We're too near the Sound to take any chances with the fall rains."

"Okay, dear, but hurry. You won't want to miss this."

At the foot of the short flight of wooden stairs that led to the basement Jones stopped to think.

There *were* packages — he saw them himself! Big devils too! You just can't slip anything like that in your side pocket. And she wasn't the least bit concerned about him prowling around the joint! That's what had him stymied. If there *were* men coming in here all day, and they *did* carry a bunch of stuff, what in hell did she do with it? Jones bit his lip furiously. "Well," he decided, rubbing his damp palms against his trousers, "let's get on with it!"

At first the search of the basement promised to turn up nothing more than the rest of the house. He was ready to give up the whole damn thing and confront her openly with what he had seen from across the road — it seemed the only thing to do to keep from going completely nuts — when a disturbingly clean area of flooring behind the oil burner caught his attention. He rubbed his hand lightly over the floor. Not a particle of dust. He tried it on the opposite side of the room. His hand came up black. He could feel the sweat gathering on his forehead. The back of his shirt clung wet and cold between his shoulder-blades, aggravated by a trickle that stopped at his belt. He stood there for a minute, looking at his upturned palms, then walked back to the laundry sink, washed his hands vigorously and returned to the spot behind the oil burner. There was no doubt about it. That piece of flooring had been washed or waxed — and recently too. Lowering himself to his knees, he searched every inch of the area. Still nothing. The cement was solid; not even a crack.

His eyes wandered up along the wall. Now, for the first time, he noticed that this section of the plaster was smoother and cleaner than any other. Searching the strip he found that it extended from the floor to the ceiling. This was no ragged area either; the slick plaster was set off from the rest as precisely as though it had been ruled by an expert draftsman Jones stood there staring at it.

The area around the floor offered nothing; could it be the ceiling? He looked up. With just a few inches more reach he could make it. A discarded footstool brought the answer. Standing on it he was able to grab hold of the low-hanging beams. As he hung there, his arms fairly pulling out of their sockets, it happened. A pale, translucent glow fanned out across the wall, giving the plaster the bluish-white cast of the radium dial on a clock. He dropped back on the footstool. The light faded. He leaped up again, this time running his fingers swiftly across the upper side of the beam until they touched a steel slab that sank slightly into the wood under his weight.

Again the light. Only now it was accompanied by a faint hum that gradually swelled into a loud rasping and insistent buzz. Jones blanched. Suddenly there was no wall. Instead he found himself gazing bug-eyed into a huge storeroom, at the far end of which a large picture window revealed a rolling countryside, ribboned with gleaming white highways.

He swallowed hard, against a throttling lump in his throat that was choking him. Walls just didn't disappear. Not *his* walls, anyway! And that room. How the hell could it *be* there? The basement was sunk in earth. He knew that. Goddammit, he *knew* that! He dropped to the floor, the breath hissing between his slack lips in hard short gasps. There it was again — nothing but a plaster wall. A too-clean plaster wall. A too-damn-frightening plaster wall!

There must be some way to find out — some way to break through. Jones' eyes probed frantically around the basement. Alice was always so neat about the basement. Never left any empty boxes around, no excess boards even though they had bought plenty of the stuff to build extra shelves.

Suddenly he spotted a long stout curtain rod that had been discarded when they installed the traverse type in the living room. He ran to get it. With one end aimed directly at the wall and his fists clenched tight around the other, he poised himself for the attack.

The basement door opened with a sharp noise.

"Johnny, darling, what in the world are you doing down there all this time? You're missing a simply gorgeous gory mystery!"

Her words were like the impact of a boot in his face and the rod clattered to the cement.

It took a few seconds before he could answer. Thank God she made no attempt to come down the stairs!

"Oh nothing, honey. Nothing. Just checking on these basement windows. I'm coming right up now. Go on, don't miss your program. I'll be right there." His voice sounded like it had been plucked from a thin taut wire. He coughed nervously, to put it back in place.

There were figures on the TV screen that night. Yes, there were men, women, a couple of kids, and even a story. But you couldn't prove any of it by John Jones. A million dollars in talent and production went down the drain for all he saw, or cared to see. Yet he sat out the evening until Alice turned off the set with the close of the weather report.

"Ready for bed, Mr. Jones?" she asked with mocking politeness.

He stretched out of the chair, pulling painfully at his arms. Hanging from that rafter hadn't

done them much good. Jones was a "desk" man. "If you don't mind, dear, I'll read a while down here. The light might disturb you in the bedroom and it's still a little too warm for me to turn in. Couldn't sleep anyway." He kissed her gently on the forehead. "Go on, darling. You go to bed and get a good night's rest. I'll come up in an hour."

"Okay. But don't sit up all night. You'll be no good for anything in the morning. You know how you feel when you don't get enough sleep."

Jones smiled weakly. "Yeah, I know. Don't worry, I'll be up soon." He gave her a light, good-night kiss and sank back in the chair.

Nearly half an hour passed before Jones was ready to begin his investigation. First he tip-toed upstairs to be sure his wife was asleep. All was in order there. Closing the door softly he descended the two flights to the basement. There he picked up the curtain rod and went out the cellar door to the side of the house facing directly opposite the section of disappearing wall. He dug the rod deep into the ground. It hit nothing but soft, yielding, perfectly normal earth.

"I must be going off my rocker!" he muttered darkly to himself, pulling out the rod and returning to the basement. Now he inspected the wall more closely. There was no doubt about it: it looked different and it *was* different! He couldn't give up now. Dragging a step-ladder to the area, he climbed up for a better look at the beam. Now he could see it without any trouble — that steel strip he had pressed down on a few hours before. Closer inspection revealed that it could be locked into position. First he listened for any sounds that might be coming from upstairs, and hearing none, he breathed in deeply as though for a plunge.

He looked at his watch. It had stopped at 12:30. Sliding it off, he placed it on one of the rafters. Then he snapped the bar into place.

It all happened just as it had before. First the light, then the hum, then the buzz. And if ever there was a solid wall there, you couldn't prove it by sight alone.

Carefully, stealthily, Jones climbed down the ladder and walked into the huge room.

Packages, crates, boxes, packing cases everywhere. Some he recognized immediately as those he had seen being moved into his home earlier in the day. With furious energy he ripped off the covers, one after the other. This was really insane! A carton full of bobby-pins — thousands of bobby-pins! Tea-bags by the hundreds in another. A crate of oyster-forks. Bubble-bath by the hun-

dred-pound weight. One crate he couldn't budge held enough LP phonograph records to crash the sound barrier with Ravel and Debussy. This could mean anything. To John Jones of 18 Hickory Lane it meant precisely nothing! He ran to the picture window, his hands trembling with excitement.

Yes, it was there all right: the most magnificent vista of rolling countryside he had ever set eyes upon. The sky was cloudless. Visibility was a transport pilot's Sunday dream. Not only could he see for miles, but even the farthest objects were etched with a cold, brittle clarity. Off to the right a gleaming city of steel cut into the picture, complete with skyscrapers, piercing needle towers and elevated highways. An impossibly long suspension bridge leaped across a river with the grace of a ballet dancer.

But nowhere could he see any movement. No people, no cars. Just — that City.

Jones ran back into the storeroom. His anger had now given way to interest; his fear to intense curiosity. He no longer felt tired, beat and aching through every muscle as he had a few minutes before. There was something remarkably stimulating about the air — almost a heady lightness, as though he were floating through rarefied atmosphere. He began his inspection of the countless rooms that led in some intricate maze from the one he had first entered.

All were huge; each seemed to have its own purpose. One was solidly lined with control panels — gleaming spotless steel. Another was weighted with immense pieces of gleaming machinery. In another the floor was bare, while from the ceiling hung myriad balloon-like gadgets from which slim steel rods jutted in every direction. As Jones reached to touch one something grabbed his arms, pinning them tight to his body. Something strong enough to promptly warn him of the futility of struggling.

He stood there, frozen to The Thing.

With his heart pounding in his chest, he turned his head slowly to see his captor. It was faintly human — a machine made into the semblance of a man. The body of a bulldozer, hands like the claws of a derrick, bloodless themselves but powerful enough to squeeze blood out of a human like an orange in a press. Through the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of its head — a solid, bullet-like affair. For one crazy moment he remembered a new experimental car that was exhibited in one of the showrooms off Grand Central, with its bulging headlights and wide gaping grill. This thing's mouth was a grill.

Out of it came sounds — flat

mechanical sounds. "Go no further!" it commanded.

As though he could! If there was one small smile left in John Jones, he would have used it then.

A siren began to emit a sound that curdled whatever blood was still on active duty in his veins. A moment later he was confronted with two men. Only this time they *were* men! Handsomely built, towering males, dressed in brilliant gold togas which they wore with the ease of Greek gods. Their feet and ankles were strongly laced with gold straw-like sandals.

One of them spoke to the robot in a language Jones couldn't even faintly understand. But evidently it was an order to release him because the steel claws dropped away. The two men signaled Jones to follow them. He was led into still another room in the mysterious pattern; a tastefully appointed conference room with soft gray walls, a great deal of pale rose-and-chartreuse upholstery and chromium fittings. The men took places at either end of a table and motioned their captive to sit across from them.

One, obviously in command, spoke. "You're a long way from home, aren't you, Mister —?" he said with what might have passed for a smile.

"— Jones," John Jones said, finishing the implied question.

"Mr. Jones. You're English?"

"American."

"Well, that's about the same." The cold smile thawed a degree. "They come here from all over the world, you know." He sat back with the complacency of a member of the Union Club.

Jones jumped up from his chair, the color flooding his face. "They? Who's *they?* And would you mind telling me just who *you* are, and where I am? I'm getting fed up with this!"

The silent partner placed a large smooth hand on his shoulder and gently but firmly slid him back in his seat. "Steady now, Mr. Jones. That will come in time. There are a few things *we'd* like to know too!"

"Like what?" Jones growled.

"Like how you crossed over, for instance," the spokesman said significantly.

Irritation distorted the lines in Jones' face. "Crossed over? I suppose you mean how did I get here? Well, you got me there too, Buster! All I know is that I was down in my own basement, a perfectly decent, respectable basement, just about an hour ago, and all of a sudden I press a goddamn gadget and I'm out here in the middle of God only knows where, grabbed by some screwy zombie and now cross-examined by you guys. *Me* tell *you* how I got here? That's a howl!" And to prove it, he howled.

"Come now, Mr. Jones," the

alien said with a degree of patience reserved exclusively for a minus I.Q. "We're not as bad as all that! Why don't you sit back calmly and tell us the whole story, just as it happened? We may be able to help you."

Jones' eyes darted suspiciously from one man to the other. Then he fell back into his chair, his chest deflating. With his head lowered and his hands working nervously, he began his story from the night he met Alice at the seance. He told of their happy life together until the moment he opened the letter; of the long watch outside their home; of the search through the basement. And finally, he told of stepping across into the Room. The men listened with rapt attention. When he finished, Jones slumped back exhausted, his hands dropping down from the table into his lap.

The first alien spoke again. "Thank you, Mr. Jones. You've been most coöperative. We realize all this couldn't have been too easy for you."

Jones grunted, a tired lifeless grunt. "Easy" was sure putting it mildly. He felt like a limp dish rag. "Now, can you tell me where I am?"

"Jones," the alien said slowly, "what you've done is to stumble across something known to very few men of your world. You don't belong here, and we aren't going to keep you. That's reserved for only the Selected — men or women, like your wife, who are receptive to our directives. Not many Earth creatures can fulfill our missions. Your wife happens to be one who can, one who was willing to cross over into our world, divest herself of all human emotion and dedicate herself to the perfect civilization."

A deep frown formed on Jones' forehead. He shook his head as though to clear it of confusion. "A perfect civilization? I just don't get it!"

The man smiled. "No, I suppose you don't. And I can hardly blame you. But let me go on . . ." He leaned forward. "How many times have you heard your people say 'I just can't get along without my car — I'm a slave to that automobile!' You've heard that, haven't you?"

"Heard it?" Jones came back quickly, "I've said it myself!"

"Well, multiply that a million times over and you have the key to our civilization here. This is slavery, Mr. Jones, but slavery in which all the so-called slaves are willing captives of a degree of living so vastly superior, so infinitely more efficient than anything you Earth people could even imagine that it takes an acutely mechanized, highly sensitized brain to understand it. This is a world of Pure Science, Jones, wherein Man is no longer his own

master. We brook no human frailties. The human equation never enters into our problems or our work. We do not destroy simply because to destroy is to retard. We tolerate nothing but progress. And in time we'll be ready. Yes, we will be ready!"

"Ready for what?"

"To take over the world!"

Looking into his eyes was like running head-on into a thousand-watt spotlight. Jones couldn't take it.

When he found his voice it was like something left over the 30-day limit at the cleaners. "But Alice? She's my wife, I love her! Where does she fit into this picture?"

The strange man spoke softly. "That, Jones, may come a little harder for you since you obviously are tormented by man-made emotion. Alice, your wife, does not and can not love you. As a subject of our scientific civilization she answers to no one but a superior mechanism. As our agent, she was appointed to marry you according to earth-bound ceremony merely to expedite the transfer of much needed commodities through the dimensions. You served our purpose; through another agent we directed you to that seance where Alice was ordered to arrange a meeting. We've learned that men weak enough to fall prey to that pseudo-mysticism can fall equally easily into our hands. You did just that. The home Alice had you buy was carefully and deliberately selected as an outpost. We have many of those throughout your world. Yours was just another in the chain."

"But the letter? What about that?"

"Yes, the letter. That, unfortunately was an accident. And you surprised us by your ingenuity in investigating its contents."

From the other end of the table the second man spoke curtly. "Measures will be taken promptly on that matter, Sir!"

The other man nodded. "That's your department." To Jones, gnawing away on his lips, he continued, "But you, Jones, need have no fear. Your emotional softness as a human has progressed too far for us to be interested in you. We don't believe in harming or killing; we aren't even remotely concerned with your life. Besides, you proved yourself unfit for us by your unwillingness to be led."

"Then you won't destroy me? You won't keep me here as a prisoner?" Jones was half off his chair, his eyes mirroring hope.

"No, you shall return to your own world."

"But what if I tell the authorities? What if I show them the cross-over point?"

"We shall expect you not to do that."

"You're so sure, aren't you?

How can you possibly be so sure you can trust me?"

The spokesman laughed widely from the back of his throat. "Of course we can trust you!"

A piercing beam of light thrust itself like a bullet into the eyes of John Jones. He slumped loosely into his chair. He never knew what hit him.

While John Jones slept in peaceful oblivion, his alarm clock droned to exhaustion. "Late again!" he grunted not too unhappily as he slid out from under the sheet and buried his toes in the soft carpet. Without waking Alice he shaved, dressed and tip-toed downstairs to prepare his simple breakfast of orange juice and coffee. While the water boiled he scooped the morning paper off the front porch.

He looked at the dateline. Wednesday, July 10.

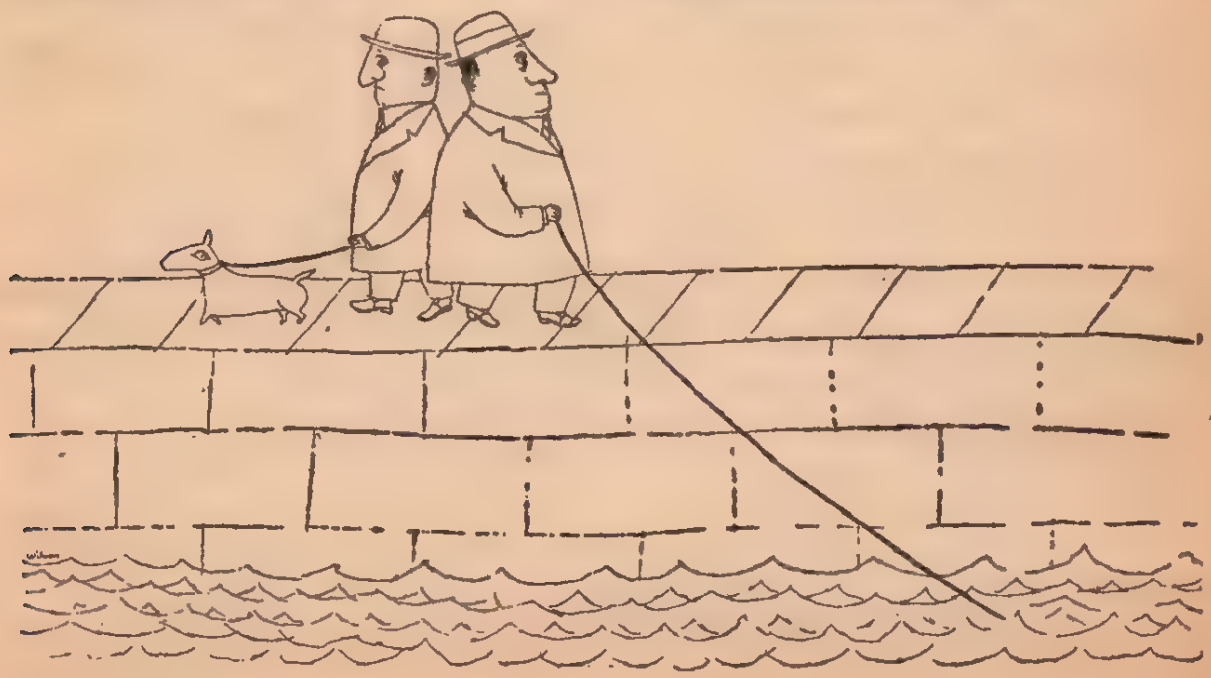
"Wednesday?" His eyes widened with disbelief.

But newspapers don't lie, so, with a resigned shrug of his shoulders he returned to the kitchen for breakfast. He scanned a few of the top headlines and then turned his wrist to check his watch for train-time.

"Now, where in hell did I leave that thing last night!" he blurted, discovering no watch on his wrist. "I'll really be good and late today!"

Back upstairs through the bedroom and the bathroom he searched carefully and quietly. He mustn't wake Alice. Poor kid, she was going to have a hot day!

Suddenly he stopped in the middle of the floor, listening to a ridiculous unspoken direction that pierced his thoughts. The basement? Why look there? He hadn't been down there in days!



But he did go down now. The ladder, normally set in the bin, was standing open behind the oil-burner. He climbed up, ran his fingers across the beam, and retrieved his watch.

As he backed the car out of the garage, he spotted the mailman coming up the Lane.

"Anything for me, Mike?"

"Sure thing, Mr. Jones," he said, walking to the car to make the delivery. "Three for you and one for Mrs. Jones."

"Slip hers in the slot, will you please, Mike? I'm terribly late today. Looks like I'll have to step on it to even make the 9:23!"

Jones stuffed the letters into his coat pocket and drove to the station.

Seated comfortably on the shady side of the train, he began reading his mail. A notice from the local political club: important meeting next Monday night. Sure, he'd go. Nothing like getting to know your neighbors when you're new in the community. Do Alice good too. She was home alone so much with so little to do, she'd love to meet the folks around. He'd get to know the men and then they'd come over with their wives. Besides, if he knew meetings, this one would wind up in a good poker game, just like all the rest. And how he missed that night of poker since he moved out of the city! A letter from Tony, the old bastard! We've only seen each other half a dozen times since college. Expected to be in town soon and wanted to meet Alice? Great! We'll ask him up for dinner.

The handwriting on the third envelope was almost childish — an uneven, half-printed scrawl. Jones flipped it over. No return address.

"Well, what kind of a gag is this?" he thought, smiling to himself. A wrinkled dollar bill fell into his lap.

*"To John Jones," it read. "Do not destroy this letter. It is worth thousands to you. This dollar bill is only the beginning. Copy this letter in triplicate, sending one, with a dollar enclosed, to each of three trusted friends, who will do the same. Do not break this chain!"*

Jones returned the letter to its envelope and shoved both into his pocket. This was really one for the books! Gotta show it to the boys downtown. Yep, there's one born every minute. Sucker!

He eased the bill into his gold money-clip, shining it vigorously on his trouser leg before putting it away. Alice had given it to him as a wedding present. Wonderful girl, Alice!

He sat back comfortably and opened the newspaper and began to read.

# Mr. STEINWAY

By Robert Bloch

*Dorothy loved a genius and wanted only to be loved in return. This certainly seemed the natural thing for a girl to ask. The Steinway thought differently.*

THE first time I saw Leo, I thought he was dead. His hair was so black and his skin was so white — I'd never seen hands so pale and thin. They lay crossed on his chest and, I suppose, concealed the rhythm of his breathing. There was something almost repulsive about him; he was so thin, so still, and there was such a *nothingness* on his face. It was like a death-mask that had been made a little too late, after the last bit of the living personality has fled. I stared down at Leo, shuddered a little, and started to move away.

Then he opened his eyes, and I fell in love with him.

He sat up, swung his legs over the side of the enormous sofa, grinned, rose. At least, I suppose he did. All I really noticed was the deep brown of his pupils and the warm, rich hunger that poured from them into me, the hunger that poured and found a feeding-place somewhere in my heart.

I know what it sounds like. But I'm not a schoolgirl, and I don't keep a dairy any longer, and it's been years since I've had a mad, mad crush. I'd been going around for years, assured that I was emotionally mature. Until he opened his eyes and I fell in love with him.

Harry was making the introductions, now.

". . . Dorothy Endicott. She heard you play in Detroit last week and she wanted to meet you. Dorothy, this is Leo Winston."

He was quite tall, and he managed a little bow, or rather an inclination of his head, without once moving his gaze. I don't know *what* he said. "Charmed" or "delighted" or "pleased to meet you" — it didn't matter. He was *looking* at me.

I did all the wrong things. I

blushed. I giggled. I said something about how much I admired his playing, and then I repeated myself and tripped over the words.

But I did *one* right thing. I looked back. All the while Harry was explaining how we'd just happened to stop up and we didn't mean to disturb him but the door was open so we walked right in. And he wanted to remind Leo about placing the piano for tomorrow night's concert, and the ticket-sales were going good according to the latest report this noon. And now he had to run along and arrange for the puffs for tomorrow's papers, so —

"There's no reason for you to hurry off, is there, Miss Endicott?"

There was, I agreed, no reason at all. So Harry left, like the good little Samaritan he was, and I stayed and talked to Leo Winston.

I don't know what we talked about. It's only in stories that people seem able to remember long conversations *verbatim*. (Or is it long *verbatim* conversations? It's only in stories that people have perfect control of grammar, too.)

But I learned that his name was once Leo Weinstein . . . that he was thirty-one years old . . . unmarried . . . he liked Siamese kittens . . . he broke his leg once, skiing up at Saranac . . . couldn't stand Chopin or Poulenc . . . he liked Manhattans made with dry vermouth, too.

It was over the second of these, after I told him all about myself (and nothing, unless he could read my eyes) that he asked me if I wanted to meet Mr. Steinway.

Of course I said yes, and we went into the other room, the one behind the sliding doors. There sat Mr. Steinway, all black and polished to perfection grinning a welcome with his eighty-eight teeth.

"Would you like to hear Mr. Steinway play something for you?" asked Leo.

I nodded, feeling a warmth far beyond the power of two Manhattans to inspire — a warmth born of the way he said it. I hadn't felt that way since I was thirteen and in love with Bill Prentice and he asked if I'd like to see him do a Full Gaynor off the high board.

So Leo sat down on the bench and he patted Mr. Steinway on the leg the way I sometimes pat Angkor, my Siamese kitten. And they played for me. They played the *Appasionata* and the *berceuse* from *The Firebird* and something very odd by Prokofieff and then several things by the two Scotts — Cyril, and Raymond. I suppose Leo wanted to show his versatility, or perhaps that was Mr. Steinway's idea. Anyway, I liked it all, and I said so, em-

phatically.

"I'm glad you appreciate Mr. Steinway," Leo said. "He's very sensitive, I'll have you know, like everyone in my family. And he's been with me a long time — almost eleven years. He was a surprise from my mother, when I made my debut at Carnegie."

Leo stood up. He was very close to me, because I'd been sitting on the piano bench beside him ever since the *berceuse*, and that made it easier for me to see his eyes as he closed the black lip over Mr. Steinway's teeth and said, "Time for a little rest, before they come and get you."

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Is Mr. Steinway ill?"

"Not at all — I thought he sounded in the best of spirits." Leo grinned (how could I ever have imagined him dead, with his incandescent vitality?) and faced me. "He's going over to the concert hall this evening — he has a date to play with me tomorrow night. Which reminds me, will you be there?"

The only answer for that one was, "Silly boy!" but I restrained it. Restraint did not come easy with me when I was with Leo. Not when he looked at me like that. With his eyes holding such hunger, and the long slim fingers caressing the panelling as they had caressed the keys, as they could so easily caress — I trust I'm making myself clear?

Certainly I was transparent enough the following evening. After the concert we went out, just the four of us; Harry and his wife, Leo, and I. And then just Leo and I, in the candlelight of the apartment, in the big room that looked so bare and empty without Mr. Steinway squatting there where he belonged. We watched the stars over Central Park and then we watched the reflections in each other's pupils, and what we said and what we did are not meant for sharing.

The next day, after we read the notices, we went for a walk in the Park. Leo had to wait until they'd moved Mr. Steinway back into the apartment, and it was lovely in the Park, as always. As it must have been for millions who, somewhere in their memories, hold an instant when they walked in Central Park in May and owned it all — the trees, the sunshine, the distant laughter rising and falling as transiently as the heartbeat quickened by a moment of ecstasy.

But — "I think they're on the way over," Leo said, glancing at his watch and rising from the bench. "I really ought to be there when they move him in. Mr. Steinway's big, but he's quite delicate, actually."

I took his hand. "Come on, then," I said.

bill ashman.

He frowned. I'd never seen him frown before, and it seemed out of character to me. "Maybe you'd better not, Dorothy. I mean, it's a slow job up those stairs, and then I'll have to practise. Don't forget, I'm booked for Boston next Friday, and that means four hours a day for the next week — Mr. Steinway and I must get our program in shape. We're doing the Ravel Concerto, the Left-Hand one, with the Symphony, and Mr. Steinway isn't fond of Ravel. Besides, he'll be leaving on Wednesday morning, so there really isn't too much time."

"But you aren't taking the piano with you on tour, are you?"

"Certainly. Where I go, Mr. Steinway goes. I've never used another instrument since Mother gave him to me. I wouldn't feel right about it, and I'm sure it would break Mr. Steinway's heart."

*Mr. Steinway's heart.*

I had a rival, it seems. And I laughed about it, we both laughed about it, and he went away to his work and I went back to my apartment to sleep, perchance to dream . . .

I tried phoning him about five. No answer. I waited a half-hour, and then I grabbed the nearest rosy pink cloud and floated over to his apartment.

As usual — as was customary with Leo, whose mother had literally kept "open house" out on the Cape — the door was unlocked. And I naturally took advantage of the situation to tiptoe in and surprise Leo. I pictured him playing, practising, absorbed in his work. But Mr. Steinway was silent, and the sliding doors to the other room were closed. I got my surprise in the anteroom.

Leo was dead again.

He lay there on the huge couch, his pallor almost phosphorescent in the gathering twilight. And his eyes were closed and his ears were closed and his very heart seemed closed until I bent down and blended the warmth of my lips with his own.

"Dorothy!"

"Sleeping Beauty, in reverse!" I exclaimed, triumphantly, rumpling his hair. "What's the matter, darling? Tired after your rehearsal? I don't blame you, considering —"

It was still light enough for me to recognize his frown.

"Did I — startle you?" It was a B-movie line, but this was, to me, a B-movie situation. The brilliant young concert pianist, torn between love and a career, interrupted in his pursuit of art by the sweet young thing. He frowns, rises, takes her by the shoulders as the camera pans in close and says —

"Dorothy, there's something you and I must talk about."

I was right. Here it comes, I

told myself. The lecture about how art comes first, love and work don't mix — and after last night, too! I suppose I pouted. I make a very pretty pout, on occasion. But I waited, prepared to hear him out.

And he said, "Dorothy, what do you know about Solar Science?"

"I've ever heard of it."

"That's not surprising. It's not a popular system; nothing in parapsychology has gained general acceptance. But it works, you know. It works. Perhaps I'd better explain from the beginning, so you'll understand."

So he explained from the beginning, and I did my best to understand. He must have talked for over an hour, but what I got out of it boils down to just a little.

It was his mother, really, who got interested in Solar Science. Apparently the basis of the concept was similar to Yoga or some of these new mental health systems. She'd been experimenting for about a year before her death — and during the past four years, since her passing, Leo had worked on it alone. The trance was part of the system. Briefly, as near as I could make out, it consisted of concentration — "but effortless effort of concentration, that's important" — on one's inner self, in order to establish "complete self-awareness." According to Solar Science one can become perfectly and utterly aware of one's entire being, and "communicate" with the organs of the body, the cells, the very atomic and molecular structure. Because everything, down to the very molecules, possesses a vibration-frequency and is therefore alive. And the personality, as an integrated unit, achieves full harmony only when complete communication is established.

Leo practised four hours a day with Mr. Steinway. And he devoted at least two hours a day to Solar Science and "self-awareness." It had done wonders for him, done wonders for his playing. For relaxation, for renewal, for serenity, it was the ultimate answer. And it led to an *extension* of awareness. But he'd talk about that some other time. What did I think?

What *did* I think?

I honestly didn't know. Like everyone else, I'd heard a lot, and listened to very little, about telepathy and extra-sensory perception and teleportation and such things. And I'd always associated these matters with the comic-strip idea of scientists and psychologists and outright charlatans and gullible old women given to wearing long ropes of wooden beads which they twisted nervously during seances.

It was something different to hear Leo talk about it, to feel the intensity of his conviction, to

hear him say — with a belief that burned — that this meditation was all that had preserved his sanity in the years after his mother died.

So I told him I understood, and I'd never interfere with his scheme of living, and all I wanted was to be with him and be *for* him whenever and wherever there was a place for me in his life. And, at the time, I believed it.

I believed it even though I could only see him for an hour or so, each evening, before his Boston concert. I got a few TV leads during the week — Harry arranged some auditions, but the client postponed his decision until the first of the month — and that helped to pass the time.

Then I flew up to Boston for the concert, and Leo was magnificent, and we came back together with nary a thought or a word about Solar Science or anything except the two of us.

But on Sunday morning, we were three again. Mr. Steinway arrived.

I dashed over to my own apartment and came running back after lunch. Central Park shimmered in the sunlight, and I admit I shared something of its radiance.

Until I was in the apartment, and heard Mr. Steinway rumbling and growling and purring and screeching and cachinnating, and I hurried in to Leo and the piano stopped.

He frowned. It seemed I was developing quite a talent for making an unexpected entrance.

"I didn't expect you so soon," he said. "I was just practising something new."

"So I heard. What's the rest of it?"

"Never mind, now. Did you want to go out this afternoon?" He said it just as if he didn't see the new shoes, the suit, the hat I'd bought from Mr. John just to surprise him.

"No. Honestly, darling, I didn't mean to interrupt. Go on with your playing."

Leo shook his head. He stared down at Mr. Steinway.

"Does it bother you to have me around when you practise?"

Leo didn't look up.

"I'll go away."

"Please," he said. "It isn't me. But I'm afraid that Mr. Steinway doesn't — respond to you properly."

That tore it. *That* ripped it to shreds. "Now wait a minute," I said, coolly (if white-hot rage is cool). "Are we doing a scene from *Harvey*, now? Is this some more of your Solar Science, and am I to infer that Mr. Steinway is alive? I admit I'm not very bright, not overly perceptive, and I couldn't be expected to share your sensitive reactions. So I've never noticed that Mr. Steinway had an existence of his own. As a matter of fact, to me, it's just

another piano. And its legs don't begin to compare with my own."

"Dorothy, please —"

"Dorothy doesn't please! Dorothy isn't going to say one more word in the presence of your — your — incubus, or whatever it is! So *Mr.* Steinway doesn't *respond* to me properly, is that it? Well, you tell *Mr.* Steinway for me that he can go plumb to —"

Somehow he got me out of the apartment, into the sunlight, into the park, into his arms. And it was peaceful there, and his voice was soft, and far away the birds made a song that hurt me in my throat.

". . . so you weren't far wrong at that, darling," Leo told me. "I know it's hard to believe for anyone who hasn't studied Solar Science or ultra-kinetic phenomena. But Mr. Steinway *is* alive in a way. I can communicate with him, and he can communicate with me."

"You *talk* to it? It *talks* to you?"

His laughter was reassuring, and I desperately wanted to be reassured, now. "Of course not. I'm talking about vibrationary communication. Look at it this way, darling. I don't want to sound like a lecturer — but this is science, not imagination.

"Did you ever stop to think what makes a piano? It's a highly complicated arrangement of substances and materials — thousands of tiny, carefully calculated operations go into the construction of a truly fine instrument. In a way, the result is comparable to the creation of an artificial being; a musical robot. To begin with, there's a dozen different kinds of wood, of various ages and condition. There's special finishes, and felt, gut, animal matter, varnish, metal, ivory — a combination of elements infinitely complex. And each has its own vibrationary rate, which in turn forms part of the greater vibrationary rate of the whole. These vibrations can be sensed, contacted and understood."

I listened, because I wanted to find sense and sanity and serenity somewhere in it all. I wanted to believe, because this was Leo talking.

"Now, one thing more, and that's the crux of the matter. When vibration occurs, as it does in all being, electronic structure is disturbed. There's an action sequence — and a record of that action is made on the cellular structure.

"Now if you record many messages on a single piece of tape at different speeds, you'd have to play them back at these speeds in order to understand the message as a whole. Inability to do so would keep you from knowing or comprehending these messages. That's what ordinarily bars our

communication with non-human life forms and gives us the impression that they have neither thought nor sentience.

"Since we humans use the development of the human brain as criterion, we aren't aware of the intelligence of other life-forms. We don't know how intelligent they are because we, most of us, don't realize that rocks and trees and everything in the material universe can 'think' or 'record' or 'communicate' at its own level.

"That's what Solar Science has taught me — and it has given me the method of entering into communication with such forms. Naturally, it isn't simple. But from self-awareness I have slowly proceeded into a more general awareness of vibrationary rates. It's only logical that Mr. Steinway, so much a part of my life and a part of me, would be a logical subject for an experiment in communication. I've made that experiment and succeeded, at least partially. I can share communication with Mr. Steinway; and it's not all one-way, I assure you. You remember what the Bible said about 'sermons in stones' — it's literally true."

Of course he said more than that, and less, and in different words. But I got the idea. I got the idea only too well. Leo wasn't altogether rational.

"It's really a functional entity, too, darling," he was saying. "Mr. Steinway has a personality all his own. And it's a growing one, thanks to my ability to communicate with him in turn. When I practise, Mr. Steinway practises. When I play, Mr. Steinway plays. In a sense, Mr. Steinway does the actual playing and I'm really only the mechanism that starts the operation. It may sound incredible to you, Dorothy, but I'm not fooling when I say there are things Mr. Steinway refuses to play. There are concert halls he doesn't like, certain tuning practises he refuses to respond to or adjust to. He's a temperamental artist, believe me, but he's a great one! And I respect his individuality and his talent.

"Give me a chance, darling — a chance to communicate with him until he understands you and your place in our lives. I can override his jealousy after all, isn't it natural that he'd be jealous? Let me attune our vibrations, until he senses the reality of your presence as I sense it. Please, try not to think of me as crazy. It's not hallucination. Believe me."

I stood up. "All right, Leo. I believe you. But the rest is up to you. I shan't be seeing you again until — until you've made some arrangements."

My high heels clip-clip-clipped up the path. He didn't try to follow me. A cloud covered the sun, wrapped it in a ragged cloth, torn

and dirty. Torn and dirty —

I went to Harry, of course. After all, he was Leo's agent and he'd know. But he *didn't* know. I found that out at once, and I cut myself off before I said too much. As far as Harry was concerned, Leo was perfectly normal.

"Except, of course, you may be thinking of that business with his mother. The old lady's death hit him pretty hard you know what show business moms are like. She ran the whole shooting-match for years, and when she kicked off like that, he kind of went haywire for a while. But he's all right now. A good man, Leo. A comer. Thinking of a European flier next season — they think Solomon is such hot stuff. Wait until they hear Leo."

That's what I got out of Harry, and it wasn't much. Or *was* it?

It was enough to set me thinking, as I walked home — thinking about little Leo Weinstein, the boy prodigy, and his adoring mother. She watched over him, shielded him, saw to it that he practised and rehearsed, regulated the details of his life so he came to depend upon her utterly. And then, when he made his debut like a good boy, she gave him Mr. Steinway.

Leo had cracked up, a bit, when she died. I could imagine that very easily. He had cracked up until he turned to his mother's gift for support. Mr. Steinway had taken over. Mr. Steinway was more than a piano, but not in the way Leo said. In reality, Mr. Steinway had become a surrogate for the mother. An extension of the Oedipus-situation, wasn't that what they called it?

Everything was falling into a pattern, now. Leo, lying on the couch and looking as though he were dead — returning, in fantasy, to the womb. Leo "communicating" with the vibrations of inanimate objects — trying to maintain contact with his mother beyond the grave.

That was it, that must be it, and I knew no way of fighting the situation. Silver cord from the mother or silver chord from the piano — it formed a Gordian knot either way, and I was weaponless.

I arrived at my apartment and my decision simultaneously. Leo was out of my life. Except —

He was waiting for me in the hall.

Oh, it's easy to be logical, and reason matters out coldly, and decide on a sensible course of action. Until somebody holds you in his arms, and you have the feeling that you *belong* there and he promises you that things will be different from now on, he understands, he can't live without you. He said all the tried and true things, the trite and true things, the right and true things. And all

that had gone before faded away with the daylight, and the stars came out and spread their splendour . . .

I must be very exact now. It's important that I be exact. I want to tell just how it was the next afternoon when I walked around to his apartment.

The door was open and I came in, and it was like coming home. Until I saw that the sliding doors to the other room were closed, until I started towards them, until I heard the music. Leo — and Mr. Steinway — were playing again.

I called it "music," but it wasn't *that*, any more than the sudden anguished scream thrust from a human throat is normal communication. All I can say is that the piano was playing and the sound came to me as vibrations, and for the first time I understood something of what Leo had meant.

For I heard, and understood that I heard, the shrill trumpeting of elephants, the slow groaning of boughs in the nightwind, the crash of toppling timber, the raw rumble of ore filling a furnace, the hideous hissing of molten metal, the screech of steel, the agonized whine of sandpaper, the tormented thrum of twisted strings. The voices that were not voices spoke, the inanimate was animate, and Mr. Steinway was alive.

Until I slid the doors open, and the sound suddenly ceased, and I saw Mr. Steinway sitting there alone.

Yes, he was alone, and I saw it as surely as I saw Leo slumped in the chair on the far side of the room, with the look of death on his face.

He couldn't have stopped in time and run across the room to that chair — any more than he could have composed that atonal *allegro* Mr. Steinway played.

Then I shook Leo, and he came alive again, and I was crying in his arms and telling him what I'd heard, and hearing him say, "It's happened, you can see that now, can't you? Mr. Steinway exists — he communicates directly — he's an integrated personality. Communication is a two-way affair, after all. And he can tap my energy, take what he needs from me to function. When I let go, he takes over. Don't you see?"

I saw. And I tried to keep the fear from my eyes, tried to banish it from my voice, when I spoke to him. "Come into the other room, Leo. Now. Hurry, and don't ask questions."

I didn't want questions, because I didn't want to tell him that I was afraid to talk in Mr. Steinway's presence. Because Mr. Steinway could hear, and he was jealous.

I didn't want Mr. Steinway to hear when I told Leo, "You've

got to get rid of it. I don't care if it's alive or if we're both crazy. The important thing is to get rid of it, now. Get away from it. Together."

He nodded, but I didn't want nods.

"Listen to me, Leo! This is the only time I'll ask it, and your only chance to answer. Will you come away with me now, today? I mean it — pack a suitcase. Meet me at my apartment in half an hour. I'll phone Harry, tell him something, anything. We haven't time for anything more. I know we haven't time."

Leo looked at me, and his face started to go dead, and I took a deep breath, waiting for the sound to start again from the room beyond — but his eyes met mine, and then the color came back to his face and he smiled at me, *with* me, and he said, "I'll see you in twenty minutes. With suitcase."

I went down the stairs swiftly, and I know I had perfect control. I had perfect control out on the street, too, until I heard the vibrations of my own high heels. And the sound of tires on the pavement, and the singing of the telephone wires in the wind, and the *snick* of traffic-lights, and the creaking of an awning, and then came the sense of the sounds *under* the sounds and I heard the voice of the city. There's agony in asphalt and a slow melancholy in concrete, and wood is tortured when it splinters, and the vibrations of a piece of cloth twisted into clothing weaves terror from a threnody of thread. And all around me I felt the waves, the endless waves, beating in and pulsing over, pouring out their life.

Nothing looked different, and everything was changed. For the world was *alive*. For the first time, everything in the world came alive, and I sensed the struggle to survive. And the steps in my hallway were alive, and the banister was a long brown serpent, and it hurt the key to be twisted in the lock, and the bed sagged and the springs complained when I put down the suitcase and crushed my protesting clothes into its confines. And the mirror was a silver shimmer of torment, and the lipstick was being bruised by my lips, and I could never, never eat food again.

But I did what I had to do, and I glanced at my watch and tried to hear only the ticking, not the cries of coils and the moan of metal; tried to see only the time and not the hands.

Twenty minutes.

Only, now, forty minutes had passed. And I hadn't even phoned Harry yet (the black mouthpiece, the bakelite corroding, the wires nailed to the crosses of telephone

***(Continued on Page 130)***

# THE YOUNG ONE

BY JEROME BIXBY

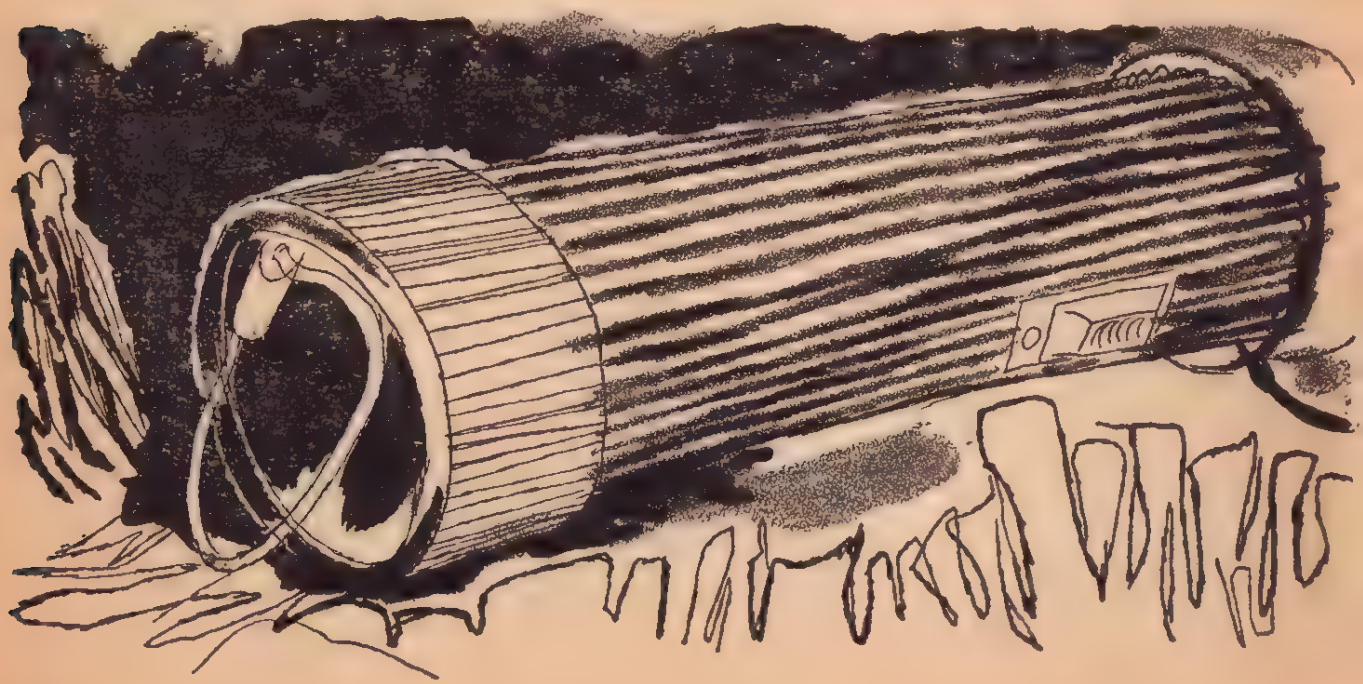
*That new kid! He did the darndest things! Like popping out of thin air so suddenly that even Old Buster couldn't get used to it. And Kovacs Bela — what kind of a weird handle was that? It all had Johnny really puzzled. He gave the kid the benefit of the doubt, though. But then things* really *got mixed up!*

OLD BUSTER was suddenly crouched on stiff legs, right up out of a sound sleep, and his ears were laid back flat against his head, and he was letting out the deep, wet-sounding growl he always used on rattlers.

Young Johnny Stevens looked up in surprise.

The new kid was standing out in the middle of the road, about ten feet away. He'd come up so silently Johnny hadn't even known he was there — until old Buster let out that growl.

Johnny stopped whittling. He sat there on the damp, tree-shaded grass in front of the Stevens farmhouse, his big silver-mounted hunting knife in one hand, the shaved stick in the other, and stared at old Buster.



Illustrator: Sanford Kossin

The dog's head was down, his eyes were up and slitted on the new kid. His lips were curled back tight against his teeth.

Johnny started to reach for Buster's scruff, afraid he was getting set to attack. But Buster gave him a mean, panicky, sideways glance, and Johnny pulled back his hand, because he knew his dog. Then Buster whined. His tail went between his legs and he started to walk backward, one slow step after another. He emerged from the shade of the big elm, where he'd been sleeping at Johnny's feet ever since lunch, and kept going backward until he was about twenty feet up the lawn toward the house. Then he stopped and threw back his head as if to howl — but he didn't. He held the pose for a second, his eyes glaring on the new kid down along the sides of his muzzle, and then he turned and ran around the corner of the house.

Buster had never even run from bear. Johnny had once had to drag him off the scent of one.

Johnny turned to look at the new kid, mad clear through and curious as heck at the same time.

The kid looked friendly, curious — and kind of lost. He was dark and thin, with big eyes. His short, stiff, black hair fit his long skull like a cap. His voice had a funny accent, and it was kind of hesitant, almost like he was afraid to talk.

"Hello," he said.

Johnny Stevens stood up. Woodshavings spilled off his lap onto the grass.

"What'd you do to Buster?" he demanded.

"I — I don't know. Dogs just don't like me. I'm sorry I frightened him."

Johnny scowled. "You didn' frighten him," he denied formally. "He musta seen something across the road."

"It was me," said the new kid softly.

Johnny turned to look at the corner of the house. Buster was poking his head around, low down, ears still back. The new kid looked over that way too, and Buster ducked out of sight like he was yanked. A second later Johnny heard the dog's claws gallop across the cellar door along the side of the house, and knew Buster must be heading for the field out back, where he went and hid whenever he was punished.

Johnny scowled harder. "Who're you?"

"Kovacs. Hello."

Johnny didn't answer — just stared suspiciously.

"What are you making?" Kovacs asked, after a minute.

"I dunno," Johnny said. Then, because that didn't sound smart, he added, "A cane, maybe. Or a fishing rod. Kovacs what?"

"Bela."

"That's a funny name."

"What is yours?"

"Johnny Stevens."

"Hello, Johnny," Kovacs Bela said again, hopefully.

"Hello," Johnny said sourly.

Kovacs Bela came to the edge of the road, where it gave onto a slope of rock and root-studded dirt that rose a few feet to the Stevens lawn. There he stopped, his thin shadow lying up the slope in front of him, as if he were waiting to be invited.

Johnny sat down again, still scowling. He didn't say anything.

Kovacs half-turned, looking down the road over his shoulder, as if sorry he'd stopped.

They watched a couple of robins chase each other through the sun-bleached rails of the fence across the road. Summer heat danced along the waving tips of wheat in the field beyond, and shimmered up the green-brown sides of the low hillocks that lined the old creek-bed.

Johnny started whittling again.

"You from that new family who bought the old Soames place?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Moved in last week, din'cha? I heard about it."

"Yes."

The robins tired of darting through the fence-rails and set off across the wheatfield, wings blurring, bodies almost brushing the carpet of tips.

"We played around there a lot," Johnny grunted. "The Soames place. Guess we can't now . . . 'cause you moved in."

Kovacs Bela was silent.

"We used the silo for a robber hideout," Johnny said accusingly.

"Silo . . .?"

"Don't you know what that is?"

Kovacs shook his dark head.

"It's the big round building, like a tin can. You're kinda dumb."

Kovacs bit his lip and stood silently, his big, dark eyes unhappy. "Do you want me to go away?" he asked.

"Sure," said Johnny, still feeling mean.

Kovacs started to turn away, with that aimless look to his movements that means one is going no place in particular — just leaving.

Johnny relented a little. "I was just kiddin' . . . c'mon and sit down."

Kovacs Bela stood for a moment, then smiled hesitantly and came up the dirt slope into the shade of the trees. He sank to the grass and curled his legs under him with an oddly graceful motion. "Thank you," he said.

Johnny peeled a long sliver of bark off the stick with his big, razor-sharp knife. "I wanna know what you did to Buster. How'd you make him act that way?"

"Animals just don't like me."

"Why?"

"My father once said it is the

way we sme . . ." Kovacs' voice trailed off. "I don't know. They don't like us."

"Us? You mean your whole family?"

"I — yes."

"You're a funny guy. Where you from, they don't have silos? You talk funny too."

"I am from Hungary."

Johnny looked closely at Kovacs Bela, taking in the dark features, the big eyes, the soft mouth. There was something about the face that disturbed him, but he couldn't pin it down.

"Where's Hungary?" he asked.

"In Europe."

"Oh . . . a foreigner. I guess Buster never saw a foreigner before."

The two robins, or another pair, came hedgehopping back over the wheatfield, arced up over the fence, over the road and into the uppermost branches of the tree directly overhead. They set up a loud chirping, and commenced flitting from branch to branch.

"Where are you from?" Kovacs Bela asked.

"Right here. Michigan." Johnny thought for a second, balancing his big knife on one finger, the heavy blade on one side, the silver-mounted handle on the other. "There's Bela Lugosi in the movies. He's always a monster or something. But Bela's his *first* name."

"It is my first name too. In Hungary, the first name comes last. I should have said my name is Bela Kovacs . . . that is the way you would say it here."

Johnny shook his head, as if wondering at the crazy things foreigners did — and the crazy way they must smell, to wake old Buster up and send him kiting the way he had.

Without being obvious about it, he tried to get a whiff of Bela Kovacs — but he couldn't smell a thing. Well, dogs could smell lots more than people. Old Buster sure must have.

Bela Kovacs had noticed the headshake. He said a little defensively, "I talk English well, don't I?"

Johnny started to deprecate; but he said instead, honestly, "Yeah. I gotta admit, you talk pretty good."

"We have been in America for almost a year. In New York. And my father taught English to me and my mother before we came."

Johnny was working up considerable interest in his first foreigner. "You mean your father's English?"

"He is Hungarian. He had to teach himself first. It took him a long time. But he said we had to move, and America was the best place for us to go. We brought over some paintings, and my father sold them to buy the farm."

"Your father paints pitchers?"

"My grandfather painted them. He was a famous artist in Hungary."

"What d'you mean, you *had* to move?"

"We . . . we just had to. We had to move to a new country. That's what Father said." Bela Kovacs looked around at the blue summer sky, the heat-shimmering hillocks, the groves of trees that lay along the landscape like clean green cushions, the dusty road that wound through low hills to Harrisville thirty miles to the east. "I am glad we finally moved out here. I did not like New York. In Hungary, we lived in the country."

The two robins had been hopping lower and lower in the tree overhead, and now they dropped side by side from the bottom branches to the lawn, where they began searching the thick grass for insects.

One hopped to within a few feet of Bela Kovacs, who still sat with his legs curled under him in that relaxed yet curiously steel-spring position.

Suddenly the robin froze — cocked its head — regarded the boy with a startled beady eye.

Then it chirped a thin note, and both birds streaked away across the lawn as fast as they could go.

Johnny stared after them.

"I like birds," Bela Kovacs said wistfully. "I would not hurt them. I wish they liked me. I wish animals did not hate us."

Johnny began to work up even more interest in his first foreigner — because maybe it wasn't the way he smelled after all.

Because birds could hardly smell anything.

Then he noticed something funny. Bela Kovacs was still looking at the place where the robins had vanished, and Johnny saw what it was that had disturbed him about Bela's face ever since He'd first seen it.

"You have funny eyebrows," he said. "They're awful thick, and they meet in the middle. They grow all the way across."

Bela didn't look at him. The remark seemed to have brought back his shyness. He lowered his head and raised one slender hand to the side of his face, as if wanting to conceal the eyebrows.

After a second, Johnny was sorry he'd said anything.

"Heck, that's okay," he said. "Look — I haven't got any end on this finger." He held up the pinkie he'd caught in the wheel on the well two years ago.

Bela Kovacs stared at the smooth pink end and his straight bar of brows rose at the outsides.

"We're all different," Johnny said — and realized that, curiously, where he had before been teasing this new kid, he was now trying almost to console him. And he wondered more than ever what

could be wrong with Bela Kovacs, to make him act so funny. Guilty, almost — like he was ashamed of something — something he was maybe afraid people would find out.

Bela was sitting in the same position, but somehow he seemed smaller than before, like he was huddled into himself. His hand was still up to his face.

"We're all different," Johnny said again. "My dad always tells me that . . . and he says it doesn't matter. He says for me never to care where anybody comes from, or how funny they look, or anything like that. That's why I don't mind you being a foreigner. I'm sorry Buster acted the way he did."

Bela Kovacs said muffledly, "I'm *so* different."

"Naw."

"I am." Bela looked at Johnny's finger. "I was *born* different."

"Naw," Johnny said again, because he couldn't think of anything else to say. Heck, he knew Bela Kovacs *was* different — anybody could see that. And he was itching to know what the mystery was all about.

He said uncomfortably, "Want to hike or something?"

"Hike?"

"Go walking." Johnny stood up and shoved the hunting knife in his belt. "C'mon, Bela. There's lots of swell places to play — I'll show 'em to you. There's the hollow tree, and the injun fort, and —"

"A real Indian fort?" Bela said, looking up finally, dark eyes wide.

"Naw. We built it outa rocks. And there's the caves, back in the hills . . . miles of 'em. You go in through a little chink that don't look like nothin' at all, and then you flash your light around and there's walls that look like waving cloth, all pink and green and blue, and secret passages and stalatites and stagmites and holes where you can't even see the bottom they're so deep."

"That sounds wonderful," Bela Kovacs said. "Will you take me there, Johnny?"

"Sure. C'mon, I'll pick up my flashlight." Johnny started up the lawn toward the house.

Bela rose gracefully to his feet, as if the steel-spring had suddenly uncoiled, and walked a few steps after Johnny. Then he stopped and looked up at the high summer sun.

"What is the time?" he asked.

"Oh . . . 'bout three o'clock, I guess."

"Is it far — to the caves?"

"Two, three miles."

Bela looked at the grass at his feet. "I have to be home by seven o'clock."

"We can make it easy. C'mon." Johnny started off again.

Bela fell into step. "Johnny —"

"Yeah?"

"I *have* to be home by seven."

"Why?"

"I — I just have to. My parents will be terribly angry if I'm not. We will not get lost, or go too far away, will we?"

"Heck, no. I know the caves better'n anybody." Johnny glanced sideways at Bela. "Won't your parents let you play at night? *Mine* do."

"It's — only on certain days that I can't go out at night. Certain times of the month."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you. But I have to be home by seven."

Johnny was intrigued by this new addition to the mystery. "Don't worry," he said. "Nothin'll happen."

They reached the front porch.

"Wait here," said Johnny.

He went into the house and into the kitchen, where Mom was already working on supper, because the Youngs were coming over for bridge tonight and supper was always something special for guests.

Johnny got his flashlight from under the sink.

Mom looked up from the chicken she was stuffing. "What are you doing, dear?"

"Goin' to the caves."

Mom frowned. "I wish you'd stay away from that place, Johnny. I wish your father would do something to make you. It's so dangerous . . . they go on for miles. Suppose you got lost sometime?"

"I won't get lost," Johnny said contemptuously. "I know every inch."

"Suppose the flashlight failed?"

"Aw, Mom, don't worry . . . I'm just going to show the new kid around."

"The new kid?"

"Bela Kovacs . . . his family bought the old Soames place."

Mom looked surprised, and a little pleased. "So they have a little boy! Now you'll have a new playmate. Is he a nice boy?"

Johnny juggled the flashlight. "Well, he's kinda funny. He's a foreigner from Hungry. That's in Europe. I guess he's all right."

"I'd like to meet him."

"He's right outside waitin' . . . c'mon, I'll interduce you."

Johnny started through the house toward the porch where he'd left Bela. Mom smiled and wiped her hands on a towel and followed.

They were just passing through the front room when they heard old Buster barking and snarling like he'd gone crazy.

Buster had Bela Kovacs backed against the porch steps, and was snaking back and forth in front of the boy as if he wanted to attack worse than anything else in the world, but was afraid to.

Bela's dark face had gone bone-colored, and he was half-crouched in an almost animal position, looking ready to move instantly in any direction, including straight up.

Johnny Stevens dropped over the porch-rail and lit beside Bela and shouted, "Buster! Cut it out! *Stop* it!"

Old Buster looked at him with the red-lamp eyes of a mad dog. Watery froth dripped from his stretched lips. His tail was curled so hard between his legs that it pressed up along his belly. He trembled so hard he could hardly stand — but Johnny knew that scared or not, Buster was set to attack any second.

Johnny hissed and clapped his hands in front of him, hard and fast. That meant Buster had better git, or end up with a sore rump.

Buster took a prowling, back-high, head-low step forward. His lips were so curled that his head seemed half teeth.

Mom screamed from the porch, "Johnny, come away!" and Johnny turned his head frantically to look at her, and Buster chose that moment to charge Bela Kovacs.

Then everything happened almost too fast to see.

Johnny felt a tug at his belt, where he'd stuck the hunting knife, and saw Bela Kovacs swing the heavy blade at Buster's head.

Old Buster lost heart, and turned and ran again, howling his heart out.

Bela Kovacs screamed, "*Silver . . .* the knife is *silver!*" and he dropped the knife and ran off across the lawn, crying and flapping the hand he'd grabbed the knife-handle with. He turned and ran down the road, faster than Johnny had ever seen a kid run.

Johnny's mother was off the porch and on her knees, frantically examining Johnny to see if he'd been bitten; and Johnny's father drove up just then in the station-wagon, craned his neck after Bela Kovacs, and asked what in hell was going on.

After supper, the grownups sat around and talked about the new family before starting to play bridge.

Everybody who had met either Mr. or Mrs. Kovacs seemed to like them all right — that was the consensus. Mrs. Young said that McIntyre, the grocer, who was generally looked up to as a pretty good judge of character, had let it be known yesterday that Mr. Kovacs had impressed him favorably. Mr. Kovacs had come in to stock up on food and some implements, and McIntyre had tried to pump him, and Mr. Kovacs had answered the right questions and resisted the rest pleasantly, and McIntyre had liked that.

And Mrs. Kovacs had waited outside the store in the Kovacs' '42 Dodge, and three townsladies said she looked like a nice woman, if a little foreign-looking.

And Junior Murdoch, at the gas-station, said that the Kovacs Dodge was in very good shape for

its age, and showed signs of recent careful overhauling — and Murdoch liked people who cared for their cars, particularly old cars that someone else might lose pride in. He thought it told a lot about them.

Nobody thought them too strange, it seemed — just foreign.

Mrs. Young and Johnny's Mom decided, on the basis of the evidence, to suggest at the next meeting of the Ladies' Club that Mrs. Kovacs be invited to join.

Then the talk got around to what had happened this afternoon.

Old Buster had come back around five o'clock, sneaking out of his hideaway in the field and looking around each time before he put his paw down for a step.

While Mom and Johnny had stayed inside and watched through the front window, and Johnny had blinked back tears of worry, Dad had gone out with his pistol in one hand and coaxed Buster over to him and, with the gun to the animal's head, examined him carefully. Dad knew a lot about animals.

Old Buster wagged his tail and took a couple of laps out of the pan of water Dad carried in his other hand.

Dad came back and said, "He's okay. I don't know what got into him. There are some people animals just hate, and I guess the Kovacs boy is one of them. It's nothing against him — from what Johnny says, he likes animals himself. They just don't like him."

"He tried to kill Buster," Johnny said. He'd been mad about that all afternoon. "He took my knife and tried to kill Buster."

Dad said, "You shouldn't be angry about that, Johnny. It was an instinctive thing to do . . . the kid was probably scared silly. Buster was out for blood, God knows why, and Bela grabbed the knife and took a swipe in self-defense. He's probably sorry he did it."

"I don't care," Johnny said sullenly. "He tried to kill him."

Dad sighed. "It's just lucky that Buster saw the knife and lit out — and that Bela missed with the knife. Bela didn't get bitten, and Buster's all right."

"It wasn't the knife," Johnny said. "Buster ain't scared of my knife. He was scared of *Bela* . . . he ran before he even saw the knife."

"Well," Dad said, "maybe. Anyway, everything's all right now. Nothing really bad happened." He paused. "You know, I feel a little sorry for the kid . . . animals hating him like that. No wonder he acts a little strange. A kid ought to be able to have a pet. Maybe he feels a little inferior to kids who can."

But Johnny was still mad. After Dad finished talking to him, he

was less mad than before — but he still resented anyone taking a knife to his dog. No matter what the provocation. And *his* knife to boot.

"I wonder why he dropped the knife and ran," Mom mused. "He yelled that it was silver, and acted like it burned his hand."

"Oh," Dad said, "he probably said 'sliver.' Maybe he got a sliver from the knife handle."

Johnny started to object, but let it go. His knife handle was of smooth, worn, hard wood and silver strips — he knew darned well there weren't any slivers on it. But still, he let it go. He'd settle the whole thing in his own way.

When Dad suggested that he go over the next day and apologize to Bela Kovacs for Buster's behavior, and show the new boy that nobody held his actions against him, Johnny said all right.

Because, though he knew Dad was absolutely right and it hadn't been Bela's fault, he still wanted to get back at Bela for trying to kill Buster — and he had a good idea of how to do it.

He'd take Bela into the caves, and pretend to get lost.

Until seven o'clock.

He'd scare the living daylights out of the kid — and maybe find out what the mysterious reason was why Bela had to be home every night by that time at certain times of the month.

The grownups finally started their bridge game, and Johnny went outside and sat on the porch with Buster and looked up at the big, yellow full moon that rode the night sky like a spotlight.

Buster had spent the last two hours prowling around the lawn, smelling everyplace where Bela Kovacs had walked, growling deep in his throat and every so often letting out a scared-sounding howl.

Now Johnny scratched Buster's ears, and thought about tomorrow.

It was a good idea. He'd scared Bela spitless — and then tell him why he'd done it and make friends with him again. Because Bela really wasn't a bad guy . . . he was just a litle queer.

The next day Johnny took his flashlight and went over to the old Soames place around three o'clock. He went cross-country instead of down the road, and as he came out of the weed-grown cornfield that old Soames had once tended so lovingly, he saw Bela Kovacs playing in the yard by the windmill.

When Bela saw him, he stood stock-still, dark eyes wide, again with that animal look to him, as if he were ready to run.

Johnny said, "I came over to say I'm sorry Buster tried to bite you."

"Oh." Bela blinked. He had his hands cupped in front of him, about belt-level.

Johnny waited for Bela to say

something else, but he didn't. Johnny looked curiously at Bela's cupped hands. "What you got?" he asked.

Bela's mouth twisted. He lifted the top hand, and Johnny saw that he held a mouse. It was curled into a ball, and its mouth hung wide open — but Johnny noticed it wasn't trying to bite its way loose. Tiny black eyes glittered up in terror.

"I caught it," Bela said. "In the barn."

"What d'you want to catch a *mouse* for?" Johnny said disgustedly. "Why not get a cat?"

Bela blinked again, and Johnny suddenly wondered if Bela hadn't been just about to cry or something, before Johnny showed up, and if he wasn't holding it back now.

"I wanted to make friends with it," Bela said softly. "But it is no different in America. All the animals hate me — fear me."

"Heck, any mouse'd be scared, caught and held that way."

"Not this frightened." Bela knelt and gently placed the mouse on the ground. For a second it stayed there, a huddled gray ball — then legs erupted and it bounded off, so fast that halfway to the barn it tripped and rolled over twice, and when it reached a gap between two boards in the side of the barn, it bounced off hard because of bad aim. Then it vanished, hind legs scrabbling.

"See?" said Bela. "It runs in terror. So would a cat. I have never had a pet " He straightened and gave Johnny his shy, lonely smile. "I am sorry about yesterday too, Johnny. I am sorry I tried to hurt your dog. I did not mean —"

"Aw," Johnny said uncomfortably, remembering how Dad had felt sorry for Bela last night — and remembering what he planned to do today in the caves. "Aw . . . forget it."

Bela took Johnny into the farmhouse to meet his parents.

Mr. Kovacs was a big, handsome, middle-aged man who moved the same smooth way Bela did. And Mrs. Kovacs moved that way too — Johnny noticed it the instant he came through the front door into the living room, for Bela's parents had just been finishing their lunch, and when they saw Johnny come in, they rose from the table with Old World courtesy. And with that strange animal grace.

"Father and Mother," said Bela, "this is Johnny Stevens, the boy I met yesterday."

Mr. Kovacs took Johnny's hand and shook it firmly and gently — and Johnny could tell, from the size of Mr. Kovacs' hand and the hard feel of its palm against his own, that Mr. Kovacs was very, very strong.

And a funny thing — when Johnny took his hand away, the

ends of his fingers rubbed against something sort of bristly in Mr. Kovacs' hard palm. It felt almost like Dad's cheek, just after he shaved — like short whisker stubble.

But that was silly. Nobody had hair on their palms. He'd probably just felt dried skin peeling away from work callouses . . .

Mrs. Kovacs, a slim, pretty woman, nodded pleasantly and said, with an accent much more pronounced than Bela's, "How do you do, Mr. Stevens."

Johnny swelled a little. It was the first time anyone had ever called him Mr. Stevens.

"I'm pleased to meet you," he said.

"Bela has told us what happened yesterday," Mr. Kovacs said. "Please, may we add our apologies to his? It is unfortunate — but animals just do not like us. It is a peculiarity of our family."

"Heck," Johnny said. "*I* came over to apologize. And to play with Bela."

Mrs. Kovacs smiled and said almost exactly what Johnny's mother had said the day before: "How nice . . . for Bela to have such a nice boy his own age to play with."

It was Johnny's turn to smile shyly. He looked away, and for the first time got a look at the inside of the Kovacs home.

The last time he'd been in this house, about three weeks ago, it had been bare walls and refuse-cluttered floors. Now there was furniture — mostly ordinary stuff. But there were some things — the round table in the middle of the room, for instance, and that big bookcase-desk against the wall — that were pretty foreign-looking. And the pictures — most of them were in fancier, heavier frames than any he'd ever seen, and a lot of them were of funny foreign buildings. And the tablecloth, and the candlesticks and lamps and the rug — oh, lots of the smaller things around the room had a foreign look. A sort of solid, warm, old look.

Mr. Kovacs, noting Johnny's interest, said in a deep bass voice, "We brought many of our things from Hungary."

"It looks nice," Johnny said.

"Thank you," said Mr. Kovacs gravely.

Mrs. Kovacs commenced to clear the table, and Johnny glanced casually at the plates . . . and when he saw what the lunch had consisted of, his jaw sagged and he looked again.

Raw meat. A roast of beef, it looked like — except it wasn't roasted. And nothing else. A big platter of red, blood-juicy beef in the middle of the table, three red-stained plates at the chair-places, glasses and a pitcher of water.

Again Mr. Kovacs noted Johnny's interest. Or his amazement.

"Raw meat," he said, a little heavily, "is good for the blood. We eat raw beefsteak once or twice a week, young man."

"Oh," said Johnny, trying not to stare so hard. "I guess I read about that someplace myself — 'bout raw meat being good for you. But I don't think . . ." His voice trailed off.

"You do not think you would like it," Mrs. Kovacs smiled, picking up the plates. "But you are too polite to say so."

Johnny nodded uncomfortably.

"Now," said Mr. Kovacs, "come here, young man."

Johnny moved to stand before the man's chair. He didn't know exactly why — except that he felt somehow that Mr. Kovacs was a friendly man.

Mr. Kovacs looked appreciatively — almost critically — at Johnny's well-muscled arms and firm neck and clear eyes. "You are in good health," he said.

"I — I guess so."

"You will make a good playmate for our Bela," Mr. Kovacs said. "He is very active. Do you know the country here?"

"I've lived here all my life."

"Good. You will tell Bela of any dangers that exist, yes?"

"Sure."

"Good. Now, Bela, why don't you show your new friend around the house?"

Mrs. Kovacs began to remove the platter of raw beef. Mr. Kovacs reached out and took one of the remaining chunks and bit into it with teeth that, when he opened his mouth wide, were startlingly long and white and, from the way the meat tore, sharp.

He chewed and looked at Johnny again, a little reflectively. Johnny and Bela were over by the bookcase by the stairs — Bela was showing Johnny what Hungarian writing looked like.

Mrs. Kovacs looked too, and her large eyes — now they were almost luminous — traveled up and down Johnny's body, along the muscular arms and legs, dwelt on the tanned throat. She licked her lips.

"In the old country . . ." she sighed in Hungarian.

"Eva," said Mr. Kovacs, softly but warningly, also in Hungarian.

"Ah, *imadot* Ferenc, I am only thinking. But *look* at him . . ."

Mr. Kovacs smiled at the expression on her face. "Sh-h, now, Eva. We have left all that behind . . . it is best not even to think."

"*Sajnos* . . ." Mrs. Kovacs picked up a small piece of beef and bit into it with teeth as long and sharp as her husband's. She sighed again. "A new country, a new life . . . I know, my dear."

"You are unhappy, Eva?"

"Unhappy?" Eva Kovacs smiled down at him, and since her lower lip concealed the points of her teeth, it was quite a pleasant

smile. "Only my belly suffers. I am happy that we are safe, Ferenc."

He took her hand and pressed it against his shoulder. "The old country, the old life . . . it is impossible to live that way any longer, Eva. We are known. Not you, perhaps, nor I, nor little Bela, but *we* . . . all of us . . . known by signs familiar to the smallest child. While here — here they do not know us, or even believe in us — and we must let it remain so. We must forsake the old ways."

"You are not disappointed in America, then."

He shook his massive head. "America is best, in every way. There is no tradition to expose us. The political situation is good. And living conditions, and opportunity. No, mamma, I am well content here — except —" he put his big hands palms-up on the table before him and flexed them and then slowly made fists around the clean-shaven stubble on the palms — "except at this time of the month, when the moon turns her full face to us . . ."

"Yes," said Eva Kovacs softly. "Yes."

"But beef does not taste so bad, my dear. Not so bad, at least, as a silver bullet."

Mrs. Kovacs popped the last of the beef into her mouth, chewed powerfully, and swallowed. She seemed to be tasting it in her throat, feeling it, almost analyzing it as it went toward her stomach. "No," she said slowly. "Once you are used to it, it is not bad. But —"

"Do not think about it, Eva."

"We cannot even chase the cow," she said softly. "We must go and buy —"

"I know.'

Mrs. Kovacs looked across the room again at Johnny Stevens, and her large eyes grew larger.

"Eva," Mr. Kovacs said, a little sharply. "You would not think of —"

"No, no," she said, and licked blood from fingers which seemed to have grown just a little hairier, and the nails a little longer. "Of course not, *imadot* Ferenc. It is just when I remember . . ."

"We must forget."

"And they are so *healthy* here . . ."

"We must never change again, Eva. Never."

"And Bela?"

Ferenc Kovacs sighed. "He is too young yet — too young to know. We must be sure that he is always with us when he changes. Soon he will be old enough to control the change, as we do — then we must worry no longer in our new home."

Bela had been showing Johnny his room, which held an old poster-bed, a very old maple bureau, and a carved chest full of fascinating toys such as Johnny had never seen before.

Now the boys came back to the living room, and Bela said, "Mother, we are going out to play."

"All right, Bela. But remember — come home before seven o'clock."

"Yes, mamma."

"You know what time of the month this is, don't you?"

"Yes, mamma." Bela looked uncomfortably at Johnny. "I will be back."

"You *must*," said Mr. Kovacs. "Just as you did in New York. You know why, Bela . . ." He turned to Johnny. "You will not keep our Bela out late, will you? You see — he is not well . . . that is why it is very important that he return home before nightfall."

"Oh," said Johnny. "I'll be careful. I mean, I'll — I won't —" And he looked away in confusion, thinking of what he planned to do in the cave.

Mr. Kovacs' big eyes were still on his face when he looked up, and Johnny felt they were looking right through his own eyes at the inside of his skull.

"I think," said Mr. Kovacs, "that you had better be."

Bela's parents came to the door and stood in the sunshine, and as Johnny and Bela turned to wave at them from the edge of the cornfield, Johnny noticed for the first time that their eyebrows were just like Bela's — straight, thick bars of hair that ran right across their foreheads.

The entrance to the caves was just a black chink in the rocks on the hillside. They climbed up toward it, leaping from one big boulder to the next under the afternoon sun.

They reached the black hole, and felt the coolness of it on their faces, even in the sunshine.

Bela hung back when Johnny started to go right in.

"Johnny . . ." he said.

"Yeah?"

"Don't forget . . . I *have* to be back before seven."

Johnny put his hands on his hips. "Well, f'gosh sakes, yes! I heard it enough. What's so awful that'll happen to you if you don't? D'you have to take medicine or something?"

Bela shook his head. "I can't tell you. But it's awful, all right. You won't get lost or anything, will you?"

"No," said Johnny emphatically, crossing his fingers behind his back.

"You heard what my parents said . . . I have to be home before the moon rises."

"The *moon!* What's the moon got to do with it?"

Bela just looked nervously at the black hole in the hillside.

And Johnny didn't ask about it again. He just sniffed, "The moon, f'gosh sakes!" as if he were dismissing it as something else crazy

that foreigners — especially Hungarians — worried about. Because he knew he had a better way of finding out.

"Johnny . . . perhaps I had better not go in. Not now."

Johnny put a jeer in his voice. "Scared?"

"Not for the reasons you think," Bela said, dark eyes flashing. "You do not understand."

"Well, come on, then . . . I promise —" the crossed fingers again — "I won't get lost."

Johnny started again into the black chink. Bela hesitated for a second, and then followed.

Actually, Johnny thought as they made their way through the narrow fissure into increasing darkness, the crossed fingers weren't necessary — because he wasn't planning to really get lost; only to *pretend* to get lost.

And he wasn't sure he was going to do even that, now — not if Bela was *sick*. That was different. Maybe it explained a lot — even old Buster's behavior. Dogs sometimes got funny around sick people.

But he wasn't sure that that *was* the explanation. It sounded a little fishy to him. Why all the mystery, if Bela was just sick? Or was it some awful-to-*gosh* disease? If so, why was Bela let out to play and maybe give the disease to someone else? And Mr. Kovacs had said that Bela was very active. That didn't sound like he was sick. And Bela sure didn't look sick.

Johnny decided he'd wait and decide what to do later.

The floor of the chink dipped down, and turned at a right angle, and they were inside the caves.

Johnny turned on his flashlight. And heard Bela gasp.

All around them were curtains and draperies and carpets and fountains of stone — gray, pink, blue, green, lavender, stretching from where they stood to a sharp sixty-foot downslope ahead of them, which led to the cave floor below and off into inky shadows that looked almost like solids.

Johnny played the beam of light around, giving Bela a good look at everything worth seeing here near the entrance. Then he said, "Let's start down."

They made their way across ripples of pastel-shaded stone to where the downslope began. The sounds they made started to echo, and the air was very dry and cool.

The beam of the flashlight was hard and bright, and the blackness pressed in on it as if trying to squash down it to pencil-thinness — but the beam moved like lightning, cutting like a knife, and wherever it opened the blackness it revealed wonders of color and shape.

"The waves in the slope make steps," Johnny said, pointing the light downward. "See? We can go

down that way. How do you like it?"

"It is beautiful," Bela whispered.

They started down, Johnny keeping the light always on their footing and guiding their progress down the face of rock by familiar rippling formations and splashes of color.

At last they reached the bottom, and Johnny said, "This way."

As they started across the uneven floor of the cave, Bela asked, "Do you know the time, Johnny?"

"'Bout four . . . you got lotsa time."

And soon the caves became so beautiful that Bela forgot entirely to worry about the time.

They passed fountains and sprays and mists and museums of stone, gleaming with colors purer and more delicate than any ever seen on Earth's surface. They passed rows of marching stalagmites of green and blue and bright orange, here and there united with drooping stalactites to form arching passageways and gardens of pillars. They moved slowly beneath walls of rippled stone, as if blue or pink or purple lava had been frozen in midflow.

They passed lakes of blue-black water, so still and smooth that one had almost to touch them to be convinced that they weren't glass.

They moved up vast slopes of colored stone like insects up a giant Christmas tree ornament, and when they reached the top, Johnny would select this dark passage or that and lead them on into royal chambers of purple and white, and then up a curving crimson staircase to a balcony of coral pink and green where more passages offered further mysteries to be explored.

They moved along the edges of crevices so deep that a penny dropped made no sound — not even the whisper of an echo.

Once Johnny turned off his light and told Bela to stand still, and they listened to the silence which can not be qualified, the silence which is absolute — the silence that exists only underground.

They heard their own hearts beating.

At last Johnny was sure the time must be about six o'clock.

"We'd better get started back," he told Bela. "If you're going to get home by seven. This way."

And he led the way back to the place where they had entered the caves. And there he pretended to get lost.

It was easy. Bela was new to the caves. He probably wouldn't recognize the entrance even if Johnny flashed his light up the long slope right to the chink where they'd come in.

Johnny wasn't sure yet whether he wanted to keep up the pretense for more than a few minutes

— maybe just throw a short scare into Bela, and then take him on out of the caves so he could go home by seven. After all, if Bela was sick . . .

But he wasn't sure about that. It still sounded fishy. And he was more curious than ever to know what the mystery was all about — even if it *was* some kind of disease.

He said worriedly, "Bela . . . I — I'm not sure which way we go from here. I think maybe I'm lost . . ."

And he looked to see what effect it would have on the Hungarian boy.

Bela's eyes grew huge. "Oh, *no* . . . Johnny, you do not mean it. You *promised!*"

John pretended to be confused — even afraid. "I — I'm sorry," he stammered. "I just lost the way. I was so interested showing you around. Gosh, Bela —"

"But, Johnny, I *have* to get out. I have to get home before . . ."

"Come on," Johnny said, making his voice worried. "Maybe — maybe it's this way."

And he led Bela in a huge circle through the pillars and passages and hanging stone curtains that surrounded the entrance. It took about half an hour, and then they were right back where they'd started from — within a hundred feet of the entrance.

Johnny said, "I just don't know where we *are!*"

"What time do you think it is?" Bela asked, his voice terrified.

"Six thirty, about."

Bela shuddered and looked at Johnny, his eyes shining enormously in the light. "Johnny, do something! I have to get *out* . . ."

Johnny put panic in his voice. "Well, what can *I* do? I'm sorry! I'm scared too! Maybe we'll *never* get out!"

"Try," Bela begged. "Try, Johnny . . . can't you remember the way?

Looking at Bela in the light, at the big dark eyes and smooth brown skin and white straight teeth and lithe body, Johnny decided abruptly that the story about Bela's being sick must be phony. It was something else . . . There was some other reason why Bela was so frantic about being home by seven, and why his parents were so emphatic on the same point. Some real strange, funny reason — and Johnny wanted to know what.

He decided to do as he'd originally planned — keep Bela down here and watch to see what happened.

He turned around as if in indecision. "I think — I think maybe it's off this way. Come on!"

And he led Bela in a circle the other way around, by a slightly different route, and they ended up by the entrance again.

Johnny knew it must be nearly

seven by now. He kept a sharp eye on Bela while pretending to search for the entrance chink that was really right up the slope over their heads.

Would Bela know, somehow, when seven o'clock had arrived? And was it something that would happen to him right at seven that he was afraid of? But how could he know? . . . and what could happen down here in the caves? Or was it something his parents would do to him later, as punishment for not getting home by that time?

"Johnny!" Bela said suddenly, close by Johnny in the blackness, a quaver in his voice.

Johnny stopped his pretense of searching, and put the beam of light on Bela. "Yeah?"

Bela was trembling all over, and he was looking up at the roof of the cave. As Johnny watched, he hunched his shoulders a little — sort of cringed — and his face got even tighter, as if he saw something horrible coming at him right down through the blackness and the solid rock.

"It is almost seven . . . Johnny . . . *do something* . . . it is going to *happen!*"

"What's going to happen? *What* can I do?"

"I do not know," Bela cried, and echoes came back, *I do not know, do not know . . .*

"You don't know what I can do?"

"I do not know . . ." . . . *do not know, not know, know, know . . .*

"You don't know what's going to happen?"

"I do not know! I am frightened . . . it never happened to me away from home before . . . Johnny, you *promised* . . . ah, mamma, mamma, mamma —" and Bela began to cry. He sank to a heap on the colored stone floor, and tears rolled down his cheeks and splashed on the stone and made the colors deeper, and he wailed things in Hungarian until he could hardly talk any more but just cried.

"You don't know what's going to happen?" Johnny asked, amazed.

Bela choked trying to talk, and coughed hard, and the echoes came back like footsteps across his frantic voice. "I know, but I do not know what it is, or why, it just *happens* . . . ah, mamma, *mamma* . . ."

Suddenly his back stiffened, and his hands clawed out in front of him. His streaming eyes rolled up to Johnny's face. He whined like an animal.

"Johnny . . . it is seven . . . the moon is rising . . . I can feel it . . ."

"*Feel* the moon? Down *here?* How can —"

"It does not matter where . . . I can *feel* it . . . I can feel . . . mamma, mamma — ah, ah, *ah!*"

And Bela's face twisted into an expression of such terror and agony that Johnny was suddenly chilled — and he decided that his joke had gone far enough. In fact, all of a sudden he was pretty darned scared — he hadn't expected anything like this. Golly, if Bela really *was* sick . . .

He bent over the huddled figure on the cave floor and pointed his flashlight upward.

"Bela, look!" he said loudly. "Look up there . . . *there's* where we came in! Come on — let's go out!"

Bela didn't answer.

"Bela . . . C'*mon*."

Bela moved, and his fingernails scratched the rock so hard it sounded like they'd tear off.

Johnny began to tremble. He looked down, the flashlight still pointing up.

Bela's eyes gleamed up at him from the floor — enormous, yellowish in the reflected light, glassy, fixed — somehow baleful.

As Johnny watched, they seemd to move closer together, and get yellower.

Johnny was so startled he dropped the flashlight. It thumped on the stone at his feet, and glass broke and the light went out.

In the blackness — the utter thick blackness — Johnny heard a scuffling sound near his feet, and a low, soft, animal snarl.

He yelled and leaped back. His foot struck the flashlight, and even as he went down, he got one hand on it, and with the other hand he dragged his big hunting knife out of his belt. He hit hard on his side. He pressed the flashlight button and prayed that it would work.

It did.

Bela was gone.

Wide-eyed, Johnny rolled over. Kneeling there, he darted the light this way and that. Finally he found his voice.

"B-Bela . . ." he quavered.

Nothing happened.

He got to his feet and stood shaking. "Bela?"

There was a claws-on-stone sound from the blackness behind him.

He whirled, his neck stiff and cold, and lashed the beam of light across the shadows. He held his hunting knife hard, the point straight out, ready to stab or slice from almost any angle.

At first he saw nothing. Rocks. Curtains and pillars of colored stone. Black shadows that seemed to lean toward him.

Then a low shadow moved at the corner of his vision.

He swung the light that way.

Two yellow eyes, low against the stone floor, blazed back at him.

"B-Bela?" Johnny whispered, and lifted the light so that it shone directly on the possessor of the eyes.

The creature slitted the eyes

and snarled to reveal sharp white fangs and charged.

Mr. and Mrs. Kovacs were looking both furious and terrified at the same time. They stood by the big table in the living room, where they'd been sitting playing some kind of game with big colored cards when Johnny came bursting in to tell them what had happened in the caves.

"I'm sorry," Johnny said, for the dozenth time — and wiped a hand across his tear-stained cheeks. "I didn't mean to do it . . . it was just a joke. Please, call Sheriff Morris and ask him to get a posse out . . . they'll find Bela, honest they will!"

Mr. Kovacs' large eyes were brilliant with anger — and his deep voice was almost a snarl. "*I* will go look for Bela, young man — and you had better go home. I do not think we want to see you any more!"

Johnny turned miserably toward the door.

There was a growl from the darkness right outside.

Mrs. Kovacs gasped, "*Bela* . . ."

The creature came panting through the open door and made a beeline for Johnny's leg.

Johnny said, "It isn't Bela . . . it's that darned wolf cub!"

He dodged and dropped to one knee and cuffed the cub playfully on the side of the head.

It snarled like a lapdog and backed off and put its belly against the floor. Its tiny ears were flat against its head, just as old Buster's had been when he'd first seen Bela, and its yellow eyes gleamed hungrily on Johnny's throat.

It charged again, stubby legs pumping.

Johnny caught it neatly by the scruff of the neck and shook it gently. It snapped and snarled and waved its legs.

"I'll be darned," he said, forgetting for the moment that Mr. Kovacs had practically ordered him out of the house. "The little feller must've followed me here . . ."

"You saw the little wolf tonight?" Mr. Kovacs said sharply, eyes widening and glowing a little brighter.

"Sure. In the cave. Just after Bela ran off. It tried to bite me then too, and now it followed me all the way to your place." Johnny grinned feebly, looking from Mr. Kovacs' rather grim face to Mrs. Kovacs' somehow relieved one. "I guess it wants to eat me or something."

"I suppose," said Mr. Kovacs heavily, "it does."

"I'll take it outside and turn it loose again," Johnny said.

"Again?"

The cub swung from Johnny's grasp, rolling its yellow eyes hungrily at the nearest finger. Johnny

nodded. "I carried it up out of the caves, after I gave up hollering for Bela. Figured it wasn't right to let it die down there. Maybe when it gets older, I'll shoot it if I see it . . . but now I figured to give it a chance, it's so young."

"Yes . . . a young one."

"Oh, give him to me, young man," said Mrs. Kovacs. "He's so cute!" And she took the wolf cub from Johnny's arms before Johnny could protest it was dangerous, and cuddled it in her own. It whined and looked up at her with its big yellow eyes, and didn't struggle at all to free itself.

Johnny was too unhappy to wonder at that, though, or even notice it.

"Now go home, young man," said Mr. Kovacs.

Johnny turned to the door again. "Will you turn it loose afterwards, Mr. Kovacs? You won't kill it, will you?"

"I will not kill it."

"And you better call the sheriff to help you look for Bela. I'll help too, if — if you want. I know the caves like —"

"Bela will be all right," Mr. Kovacs said.

"When you find him, will you please tell him I'm sorry for what I did?"

"Yes."

Johnny had reached the front door when Mrs. Kovacs said something soft in Hungarian, and Mr. Kovacs grunted and said, "Young man."

Johnny turned. "Yes, sir?"

The wolf cub was on the table, and Mr. Kovacs was thoughtfully scratching the scruff of its neck.

"Young man," Mr. Kovacs said slowly. "I do not want to be harsh. I have thought it over. What you did was not very nice — but I think it is understandable. I think it may be forgiven. And you came to us immediately and told us about it — and now you have offered to help undo what you have done."

"Yes, sir?"

"You may come here as often as you wish, and play with our Bela."

Johnny brightened. "Yes, sir! Thank you!"

"Provided you never do anything like that again."

"Yes, sir. I mean, no, sir!"

"Now," said Mr. Kovacs a little intently. "I would like to make absolutely certain of what happened in the cave. It happened like this, yes? Our Bela became sick; you dropped your flashlight; when you turned the light on again, Bela was gone."

"That's right, sir."

"You did *not* see where Bela went."

"No, sir."

"And then you saw the little wolf."

"Uh, huh." Johnny grinned. "It was a dope to wander in there. Lucky I came along."

"M'm," said Mr. Kovacs. "Yes." His eyes, which had become a little larger as he questioned Johnny, lost some of their wary glow; and his fingers, which had become just a tiny bit hairier, relaxed. "Now, you had better go. I will — find Bela. Good night, young man."

"Good night, Mr. Kovacs. Good night, Mrs. Kovacs."

As Johnny turned to leave again, Mr. Kovacs said, "Another thing, young man."

Johnny paused.

"I was not entirely truthful with you. Our Bela is not really sick. It is just that at certain times of the month, he is expected to be home before nightfall because . . . well, I believe you might call it a custom. A Hungarian custom. An old family custom. It must be observed. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"We will not tell Bela what you did . . . if you will promise never to tell anyone what happened tonight."

"Yes, sir."

"We would not want to be thought queer by our neighbors. After all, young man, customs differ. We are all of us different."

"Yes, sir. My father taught me that."

"Did he teach you to keep promises?"

Johnny grinned. "He licks me when I don't."

"Do you promise, then?"

"Yes."

"You will make a good playmate for our Bela, as I said. Good night, young man."

Smiling, Johnny Stevens left. When he reached the edge of the cornfield, he began to whistle at the full moon overhead. He wondered if the moon always rose at seven in Hungary . . .

Naw. Maybe it was just a time set so Bela would always be home before it happened, and observe whatever the custom was. But, heck, lots of times the moon rose earlier than seven. Even the full moon, like tonight — it always rose when the sun set. Four o'clock sometimes, in winter.

Maybe — Johnny nodded, remembering something from school — maybe the Kovacs figured the time for Bela to be home by the seasons, by the months. Even by the — the — latitudes.

What a funny custom. Maybe someday Bela would tell him about it . . .

Mr. Kovacs looked thoughtfully at his son.

"We could have lost all," he told his wife, "but for a boy dropping a flashlight. Our new country is good to us. Now — the time has come when we must tell Bela what he is."

Illustrator: Wm. Ashman

# ONE FOOT IN YESTERDAY

BY WILLIAM LINDSAY GRESHAM

*A true story of the supernatural, recounted by the author of that dynamic modern novel — Nightmare Alley. The facts which Mr. Gresham sets forth in this article have never been successfully refuted. Still, there are many who remain doubtful. And they can hardly be blamed, because the story is so fantastic as to be almost beyond belief.*

IT HAS been done. A kink in space-time has been found; people have slipped through it, seen the earth as it was, spoken to the inhabitants of another age, and returned from Yesterday. To believe it we have only to believe evidence —evidence which would stand up in any law court in the world where justice and truth were the objects, and where no axes, political or pseudo-scientific, were being ground. It was done by accident on the 10th of August, 1901.

If you have heard the story before, bear with us; Dr. Johnson said that men need to be instructed less frequently than they need to

be reminded. When I first heard the story I, too, thought it was an elaborate hoax. But let us consider the witnesses from the standpoint of intelligence, acuteness of observation, character and academic status.

Miss C. Anne E. Moberly was principal of St. Hugh's College, Oxford. Miss Eleanor F. Jourdain was vice-principal and Taylorian lecturer in French at Oxford University. Both were daughters of Church of England clergymen. Both were sceptics, who abhorred anything savoring of the occult.

In the Bodleian Library, Oxford, are two statements, written and signed by the Misses Moberly and Jourdain, of what they saw. There are also the depositions of 20 other people who heard them describe their journey before anyone suspected that it was a voyage into the past.

If this were a hoax it was pointless, profitless, and what is more damning in view of the ladies' background — in very poor taste. Also in substantiating it later they turned up hitherto unknown facts; library records show that no one had consulted the sources in years.

The time-travel adventure had a picturesque setting: 12 miles southwest of Paris stands the palace of Versailles, built by Louis XIV, its fountains fed by a hundred miles of water channels from the plateau of Rambouillet, its gardens blooming above a network of underground pipes and reservoirs. In 1766 Louis XV had his architect put up a pleasure house called the Petit Trianon. In this love nest there is a table which sinks down into the floor below. It was loaded with food and liquor and raised again when Louis XV was hungry and in no mood to put on his clothes. Later Marie Antoinette lived there and set up a mimic country life where she and her maids-in-waiting dressed as shepherdesses.

Sight-seeing in Paris is not complete without a trip to Versailles and on August 10, 1901, the two vacationing English ladies took the train from Paris, guidebooks in hand. Paris had been stifling but when they left the train the sky was overcast and a cool breeze was sweeping over the gardens, the broad staircases, the noble bronze statues and the pools and woods where once the nobility of France had paced in stately vanity or chased one another through the trees.

Tired at last of picture-admiring in the long galleries of the palace, the ladies sat down to rest their feet. Miss Moberly suddenly turned to her companion. "Suppose we visit the Petit Trianon!"

Those were fateful words.

Their Baedeker books gave a map of the grounds and there seemed little chance of their getting lost — at least in the three

dimensions that these ladies knew.

They descended the great staircase outside, leaving the fountains, and followed the central avenue until they reached the lake where they turned right, passed Louis XIV's Grand Trianon retreat, and came to a drive of smooth turf. Instead of walking down it to the Petit Trianon they crossed it, following a narrow lane. This was the Rubicon river of Time; unknown to them the fourth dimensional die was cast, for somewhere along that lane they walked into the year 1789.

Miss Moberly wished that her friend, who was the French conversationalist of the team, would ask directions of a woman she saw shaking a dust cloth from the window of a house they were approaching, a house which was not on the Baedeker map. But she didn't mention it.

They took a right turn, went past some buildings, saw a door open in one and looked in but didn't enter, then came to a place where the path branched into three. Two men stood in the center path and here Miss Jourdain asked the way to the Petit Trianon. The men told them to walk straight on. The men were dressed in long coats of grey-green. They wore three-cornered hats.

To the ladies' right was a cottage. In the doorway stood a woman holding a jug, a little girl reaching up her hands to take it. Both figures were "frozen" as if they were holding the pose in a tableau. They wore kerchiefs about their shoulders, the ends tucked into bodices; the child wore a skirt which reached the ground and a tight-fitting white cap. These were not the styles of the year 1901.

On entering the lane both women had felt a strange heaviness in the air like a sudden increase of barometric pressure. They both felt depressed in spirits, but neither mentioned it for fear of spoiling the trip for the other. The world about them took on an eerie flat quality, as if it were a color photograph; there were no shadows.

They walked on, following the directions of the green-coated gentlemen, until their path ended in another at right angles. Directly in front of them was a patch of woods and in it a small, circular pavilion like a band-stand, with pillars and a low wall. On the steps of this kiosk sat an evil-looking man, deeply pock-marked, wrapped in a heavy cloak and with a wide-brimmed hat pulled down over his eyes. He watched them come toward him. Just then rapid footsteps sounded on the path behind them. They turned and met a young man, also in wide-brimmed hat, wearing knee-breeches and buckled shoes. His cloak billowed out behind him as he ran. He halted and spoke to

them in French, the vowels of which were slightly different from the French they knew. He insisted that to find the Petit Trianon they must turn right. Then he ran past them and vanished, but the sound of his footfalls seemed to persist for several seconds after he had gone.

The way led across a small rustic bridge, so close to a tiny waterfall that they could have wet their hands in its spray. Farther on lay a tree-arched meadow and toward the south they spied the Petit Trianon. Passing through Marie Antoinette's English garden, they approached the terrace and here Miss Moberly saw a lady sitting on a folding stool, sketching the landscape. She wore a billowy skirt, a fichu, and a wide picture hat of antique vintage. That the guards and gardeners were dressed in the style of the 18th century was quaint but logical — but what of the lady artist and the woman and child? It was very puzzling.

The ladies mounted the terrace; the silence was oppressive. From a chapel nearby a young man suddenly burst out, slamming the door behind him. He smiled in spite of himself at the clothes the two Englishwomen wore, then called to them that the front entrance to the building was around the corner. He offered to show them the way and they primly followed him down through the French gardens, along the west side of the building and to the entrance fronting the drive. They walked through the front door. And back into the year 1901.

A very voluble, very 1901 French wedding party was "doing" the Petit Trianon and the ladies joined it and were shown through Louis XV's one-man bordello, the one place where in later years Marie Antoinette seems to have been happy.

Back in Paris the Englishwomen discussed the strange costumes of the people they had met and talked to. A fete? Or some historic pageant, possibly; or perhaps they were models for a photographer preparing stereoscopic views of Versailles. Or even a company of actors, performing before one of the new cameras which produced motion pictures when the film was projected on a screen.

It was not until the following November that, in comparing notes, they learned something uncanny about their experience: Miss Moberly had seen, and observed very closely, the woman landscape artist seated by the building. Miss Jourdain had a clear recollection of the spot — empty.

The only possible explanation for their strange experience began to dawn on the two spinsters.

Then they did what few other people of whom we have any record thought of doing: each wrote a full account of what she herself had seen on that overcast August day. They found that only Miss Jourdain had seen the cottage with the woman and child in the doorway.

These statements were placed on file in the Bodleian Library; copies were sent to the Society for Psychical Research. Then the two time-travelers began to dig into the history of the Trianon. No guards had ever worn green coats or tricorne hats — not since the fall of the King. There had been no fete, masquerade, pageant or picture taking in the gardens that day. Authorities assured them that there had never been a rustic bridge at the spot where they had crossed one. Nor was there any kiosk in those woods.

On January 2, 1902, Eleanor Jourdain again visited the gardens of Versailles. They were much different than those she had seen before. She looked for the kiosk. It wasn't there. But while walking in a stretch of woods nearby the feeling of pressure and despondency settled down on her again. And she heard music, seeming to come from a distance. Twelve bars remained in her memory; she noted them down. When checked with musicologists, they were identified as typical of 18th century popular opera. At the Conservatoire de Musique in Paris much digging finally turned up some unpublished scores of a number of light operas of the period. The themes were there — what Eleanor Jourdain had heard was a small string orchestra playing a medley of popular tunes of the 1780's.

The ladies began research in earnest and research was something they knew how to do.

The only extant map of the Trianon, dating from 1789, showed paths and buildings in different places than those the ladies had seen. This shook their confidence in their own observation. Then, in 1903, an old map was found, stuffed in a blocked-off chimney in an old house in France. It was a map of the Trianon, made by Marie Antoinette's landscape gardener, Mique. It showed the terrain exactly as the 20th century observers had seen it. And it contained the little rustic bridge of which there had been neither record nor tradition up to that time. In 1908, on a visit to the scene, the Misses Moberly and Jourdain discovered the supports of a tiny bridge, and more conclusive still, half-swallowed by a tree trunk growing around it, a broken column of the kiosk — right where they had seen the entire building, and where Mique's map had shown it to be. Later, in the French National Archives, they turned up

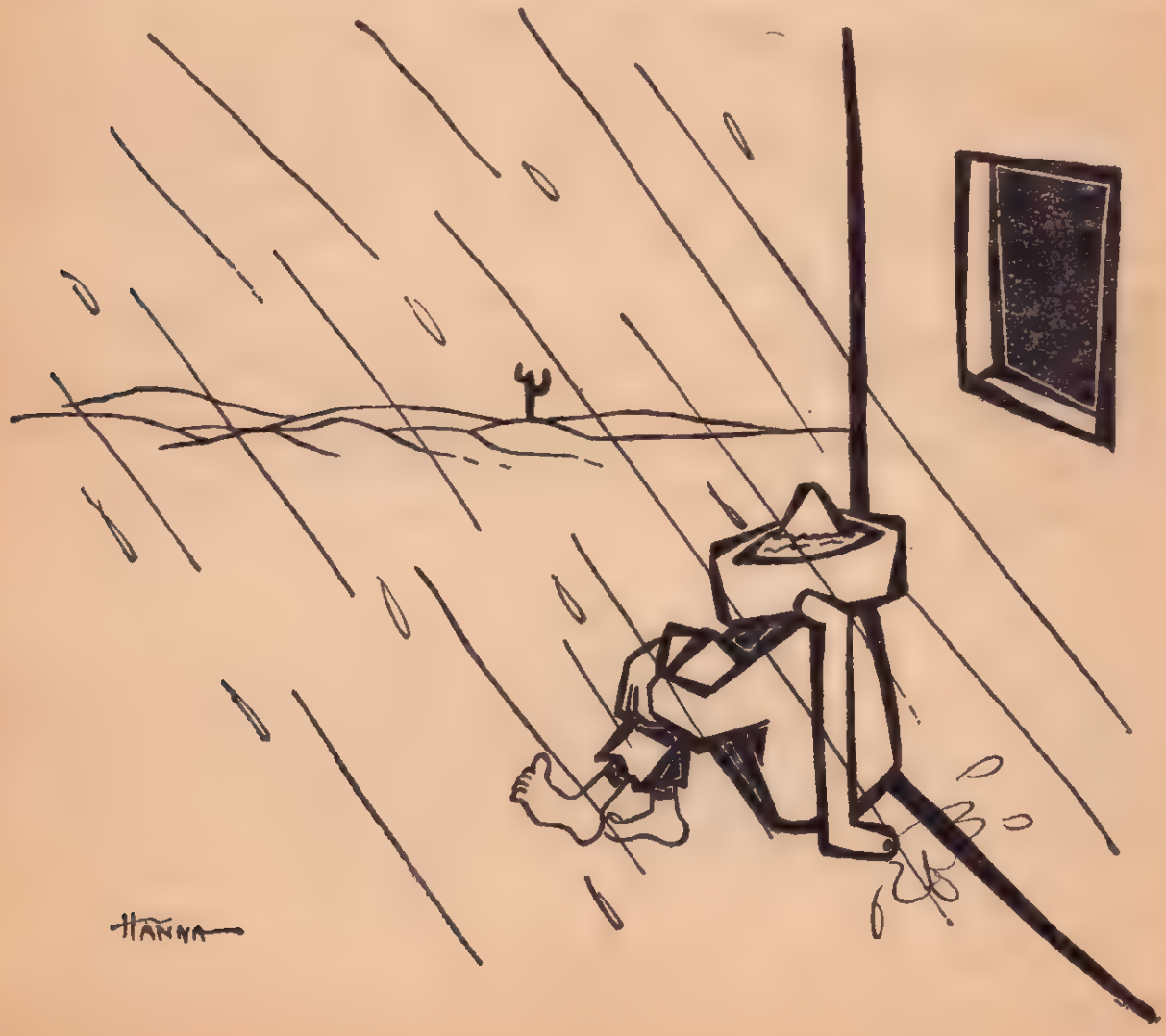
an estimate for such a structure and a notation of the sum it cost when completed.

The chapel door from which the youth had hurried had, in 1901, not been opened for 15 years, according to the authorities.

Then, on going over the ground they had covered that first time, the adventurers into the fourth dimension realized that in their walk around the building, accompanied by their volunteer guide, they had passed *through* buildings now standing on the site of the old road.

Bit by bit they reconstructed the Trianon of 1789 out of historical records, and compared it with the one they had walked through. The two matched. The ladies had no purpose save to report the truth and this they did with a genuine scientific spirit — unafraid of whatever new problems might arise.

After nine years of research they published their findings in a book modestly titled "An Adventure." For fear of ridicule they used pseudonyms- "Elizabeth Morison" and "Frances Lamont."



The book encouraged others who had had similar experiences to admit them. In 1914 a family visited the authors, asking that their names be withheld. This family had lived in Versailles from 1907 to 1908 — and had seen the topography shift and change in that eerie half-light which illumines the edges of "the fields we know." They had noticed something else: a strange buzz in the air as of an electrical disturbance which always accompanied the change in perception of the landscape. Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain looked it up. Sure enough, on August 10, 1901, there had been an electrical storm blanketing Europe.

The Trianon adventure is not the only case of real time travel — it is simply the best reported and substantiated.

On an afternoon in October 1926 another English school teacher, Miss Ruth Wynne, took a walk with a pupil of hers, a 14-year-old girl named Allington. It was on the outskirts of the village of Rougham, four miles from Bury St. Edmunds. They decided to cut across fields toward the church of Bradfield St. George, the spire of which they could see above the trees. On a back road they came to a wall of yellow-brick, then tall iron gates and through them they saw a driveway and a great Georgian manor house, standing in a park of stately trees. They admired it, wondered who lived there, and passed on, visiting the church as they had intended. On returning home by another route Miss Wynne described to her parents the house they had seen and remarked that it was strange that no family of such prominence had ever been mentioned by the neighbors as living so near their own home. Four months later she and her pupil took the same walk. No wall. No gate. No manor. Only the great trees which had surrounded the house remained, "denser, and shadier, and greener . . ." At this point both pupil and teacher, without comparing memories, wrote down what they had seen on that October day. The two accounts matched perfectly. Unfortunately, there was no map of the countryside available from olden days. And only mounds of earth remained to show where once that mansion had stood.

Are there kinks or knots in Time just as there are flaws in crystals? Let us hope that some patient observer, equipped with a camera, will take these phenomena seriously enough to set up a watch at places where they have occurred. The gardens of the Petit Trianon would be an obvious spot to begin — on an overcast day when radios are crackling with static. But he would need a stout heart — for once in Yesterday could he be sure of coming back?

# LOUIS PRISCILLA

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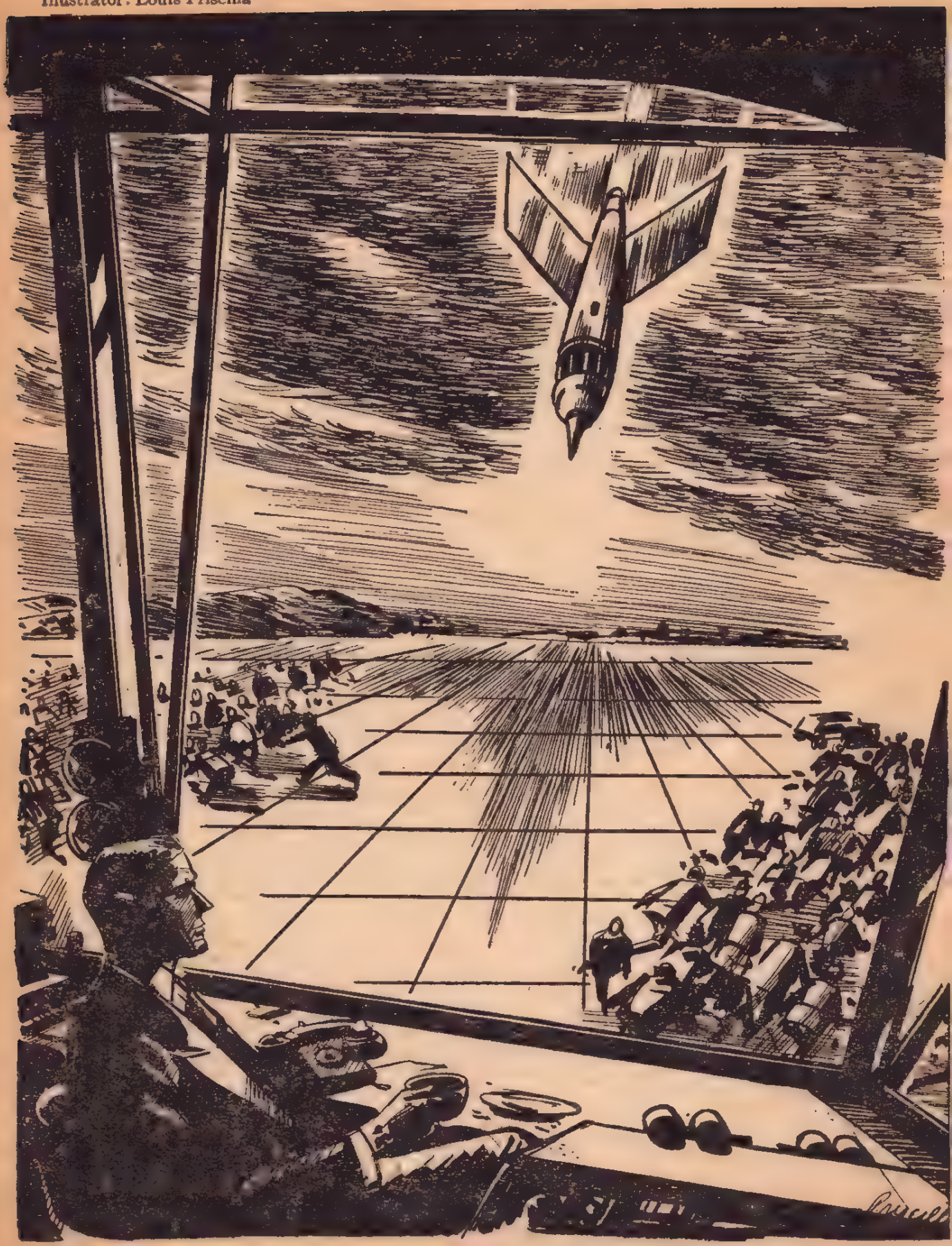
## a portfolio

Illustrator: Louis Priscilla



# BEWARE THE FURY

**BY THEODORE STURGEON**

*Meet Wolf Reger — traitor. Compared to him Benedict Arnold was a national hero and Judas Iscariot a paragon of virtue. At least that's the way it showed in the Major's notes. . . .*

*But traitors aren't born that way. Something has to happen to them long before they turn against society. That's why, when you dig deep enough, you may find that the word* traitor *can be one hell of a misnomer. . . .*

"READ it for yourself," said the Major.

She took the sheaf of flimsies from him and for a moment gave him that strange dry gaze. *The woman's in shock*, he thought, and did what he could to put down the other two memories he had of eyes like that: an injured starling which had died in his hand; his four-year-old niece, the time he struck her, and the long unbearable moment between the impact and her tears.

Mrs. Reger read carefully and slowly.

Department of Defense
Bureau of Astronautics
Division of Planetary Exploration
Personnel Office
TOP SECRET

She said, at last, "That is the foulest thing a human being has ever done." Then her mouth slept again.

"I'm glad you agree," he said gratefully. "I was afraid that —"

"I don't think I understand you," she said tonelessly.

"That's what I was afraid of," he said miserably. "You meant the report. I thought you meant Wolf Reger."

She glanced down at the report. "That isn't Wolf. Wolf might be a lot of things . . . things that are . . . hard to understand. But he isn't a traitor." The Major saw her face lifting and turned his head to avoid those hurt eyes. "I think," she said quietly, "that you'd better go, Major, and take those lies with you."

He made no move toward the report. "Mrs. Reger," he suddenly shouted, "do you think I'm enjoying this? Do you think I volunteered for this job?"

"I hadn't thought about you at all."

"Try it," he said bitterly. Then, "Sorry. I'm sorry. This whole thing . . ." He pulled himself together. "I wish I could believe you. But you've got to realize that a man died to make that report and get it back to us. We have no choice but to take it for the truth and act accordingly. What else can we do?"

"Do what you like. But don't ask me to believe things about my husband that just aren't so."

*God*, he thought, *where did a rat like Reger ever find such a woman?* As gently as he could, he said, "Very well, Mrs. Reger. You needn't believe it. . . . May I tell you exactly what my assignment is?"

She did not answer.

He said, "I was detailed to get from you everything which might have any bearing on — on this report." He pointed. "Whether I believe it or not is immaterial. Perhaps if you can tell me enough about the man, I won't believe it. Perhaps," he said, knowing his voice lacked conviction, "we can clear him. Wouldn't you help clear him?"

"He doesn't need clearing," she said impatiently. Then, when he made a tiny, exasperated sound, she said, "I'll help you. What do you want to know?"

All the relief, all the gratitude, and all the continuing distaste for this kind of work were in his voice. "Everything. Why he might do a thing like that." And, quickly, "Or why he wouldn't."

She told him about Wolf Reger, the most hated man on earth.

*Beware the fury of a patient man.*

Wolf Reger had so many talents that they were past enumerating. With them he had two characteristics which were extreme. One was defenselessness. The other was an explosive anger which struck without warning, even to Reger himself.

His defenselessness sprang from his excess of ability. When blocked, it was all too easy for him to excel in some other field. It was hard to make him care much for anything. Rob him, turn him, use him — it didn't matter. In a day, a week, he could find something better. For this he was robbed, and turned, and used.

His anger was his only terror. Perhaps this was innate; more likely it was the result of his guardian's cold theory of discipline, and a conviction that anger is a destructive habit and must be crushed the instant it shows itself. When he was two, when he was three, and twice when he was five, Wolf Reger was knocked unconscious by single, instant blows when he showed anger. Direct punishment was never necessary again.

When he was eight he was chasing another boy — it was fun; they ran and laughed and dodged through the boy's large old house. And at the very peak of hilarity, the other boy ran outside and slammed the french doors in Wolf's face and stood grinning through the glass. Wolf instantly hit the face with his fist. The double-thick glass shattered. Wolf severed two tendons and an artery in his wrist, and the other boy fell gasping, blood from his carotid spurting between his futile fingers. The boy was saved, but the effect on Wolf was worse than if he had died.

He never ran and shouted again. He lived every moment of the next four years under the pressure of his own will, holding down what he felt was an internal devil, analyzing every situation he met for the most remote possibility of its coming to life again.

When he was twelve he met a situation he could not avoid. He was in his second year of high-school then, and every day for three weeks a bulky sophomore twice his size would catch him on his way from English to Geometry II, wrap a thick arm around his neck, and grind a set of knuckles into his scalp. Wolf took it and took it, and one day he tore himself free and struck. He was small and thin, and the chances are that the surprise of the attack was more effective than its power. Their legs were entangled and the bigger boy was off balance. He hit the tile floor with his head and lay quite still with his lips white and blood trickling from his ear. For six weeks they did not know if he would live or not. Wolf was ex-

pelled from school the day it happened, and never went to another. From that point on he never dared be angry.

It was easy to hate Wolf Reger. He surpassed anyone he worked with and was disliked for it. He retreated from anyone who wanted what he had, and was despised for it.

He had two great successes — one a chemical process and one an airfoil design. They taught him enough about fame to frighten him away from it. Fame meant people, meetings, associates. After that he let others take the credit for the work he did, and if he hated them, he dared not show it.

At thirty he was married.

"Why?"

The question hung offensively in the air between them for an appreciable time before the Major realized that he had spoken it aloud and incredulously.

She said, carefully, "Major, what have you in your notebook so far?"

He looked down at the neat rows of symbols. "A few facts. A few conjectures."

With an accuracy that shook him in his chair, she said coldly, "You have him down as a warped little genius with every reason to hate humanity. If I weren't sure of that, I wouldn't go on with this. Major," she said suddenly in a different voice, "suppose I told you that I was walking down the street and a man I had never seen before suddenly roared at me, leapt on my back, knocked me down, beat me and rolled me in the gutter. Suppose you had fifty eye-witnesses who would swear it happened. What would you think of the man?"

He looked at her sleek hair, her strong, obedient features. Despite himself he felt a quixotic anger toward her attacker, even in hypothesis. "Isn't it obvious? The man would have to be a drunk, a psychopath. At the very least he would have to be deluded, think you were someone else. Even if he did, only a real skunk would do a thing like that to a woman." He suddenly realized how easily she had pulled him away from his subject, and was annoyed. "What has this to do —"

"I hope you'll soon see," she said thoughtfully. Then, "You wanted to know why he married me."

*The army wants to know that*, he corrected silently. *I'd like to know why you married him.*

She committed suicide.

Relentlessly she told the Major why, and he put his pencil down until she had finished with that part of the story. This was a report on Reger, not on his wife. Her reasons were good, at the time, and they constituted a tale of disillusion and defeat which

has been, and will be, told again and again.

She stumbled out into the desert and walked until she dropped; until she was sure there could be no rescue; until she had barely strength to lift the phial and drink its contents. She regained consciousness eight months later, in civilian married quarters at Space Base Two. She had been dead twice.

It was a long time before she found out what had happened. Reger, who would not permit himself to move about among people, took his exercise at night, and found her.

How he saved her, no one but Reger could know. He knew she was drugged or poisoned, and exhausted. He found the right medication to keep her from slipping further away, but for weeks he could not bring her back.

Her autonomic nervous system was damaged. When she began to convalesce, he started drug therapy.

And still he kept his job, and no one knew.

And then one day there was a knock on his door. One room and bath; to open the door was to open the whole room to an outsider. He ignored the knock and it came again, and then again, timidly but insistently. He extrapolated, as always, and disliked his conclusion. A woman in his bachelor quarters created a situation which could only mean people and people, talk and talk — and the repeated, attenuated annoyance which, of all things, he feared most.

He picked her up and carried her into the bathroom and shut the door. Then he answered the knock. It was nothing important — a chirping little bird of a woman who was taking up a collection for a Thanksgiving party for the orphans in town. He wrote her a check and got rid of her, snarling suddenly that she must never bother him again — and pass the word. That, and the size of the check, took care of her and anyone like her.

He nearly collapsed from reaction after she had gone. He knew he could not possibly outguess the exigencies which might arise to bring other people on errands.

"Could you direct me to the Vampire State Building?"

She had been with him for four months now. How could he explain her? Doctors would know she had been under treatment for some time; the Air Force people at the Base, and their cackling wives, would make God only knew what sort of racket about it.

So he married her.

It took another six weeks to build her up sufficiently to be moved. He drove her to a town a hundred and fifty miles away and married her in a hotel room. She was under a skilfully applied hypnotic, and carefully instructed. She knew nothing about it at the time and remembered nothing afterward. Reger then applied for married quarters, moved her back to the Base and continued her therapy. Let them pry.

"There's your androphobe," said Mrs. Reger. "He could have let me die. He could have turned me over to the doctors."

"You're a very attractive woman," he pointed out. "You were that, plus a challenge . . . two kinds of challenge. Could he keep you alive? Could he do it while doing his job? A man who won't compete with people generally finds something else to pit himself against."

"You're quite impartial while you wait for all the facts," she said bitterly.

"No I'm not," he said, and quite astonished himself by adding, "It's just that I can't lie to you." There was a slight emphasis on the last word which he wished he could go back and erase.

She let it pass and went on with her story.

She must have had consciousness of a sort long before he was aware of it. She was born again, slowly, aware of comfort and safety, an alternation of light and dark, a dim appreciation of the ways in which her needs were met, a half-conscious anticipation of his return when she found herself alone.

He told her, with terror in his eyes, of their marriage, and he begged her pardon for it. It was as if a harsh word from her would destroy him. And she smiled and thanked him.

She convalesced very quickly after that. She tried her very best to understand him. She succeeded in making him talk about himself, and was careful not to help him, ever, nor to work with him at anything.

At the time the *Starscout* was in the ways, and they were running final tests on it. Reger was forced to spend more and more time out at the gantry area.

His extrapolations never ceased, and he was aware before she was that, not being a Wolf Reger, her needs were different from his. He suggested that she walk in the

sun when he was away. He told her where the commissary was, and left money for shopping. She did as he expected her to do.

Then he didn't come back from the gantry area any more, and when the fifty or sixty hours got to be seventy and eighty, she made up her mind to find him. She knew quite a few people at the Base by that time. She walked in, stopping at the post office on the way. The divorce papers were waiting for her there.

The Major dropped his pencil.

"You didn't know about that."

"Not yet. We'd have found out anyway." He stooped blindly for the pencil and cracked his head noisily on the coffee table. He demanded, "Why? Why did he divorce you?"

"He didn't. He filed suit. It has to be put on the court calendar and then heard, and then adjudicated, and then there's a ninety-day wait . . . you know. I went to a dance."

"A — oh." He understood that this was in answer to his question. "He divorced you because you went to a dance?"

"No! . . . well, yes." She closed her eyes. "I used to go to the Base movie once in a while when Wolf was working. I went down there and there was a dance going on instead. I sat with one of the women from the commissary and watched, and after a while her husband asked me to dance. I did. I knew Wolf would have let me if he'd been there — not that he ever would.

"And I happened to glance through the door as we danced past, and Wolf was standing just outside. His face . . ."

She rose and went to the mantel. She put out her hand very slowly, watching it move, and trailed the tips of her fingers along the polished wood. "All twisted. All . . .

"As soon as the music stopped," she whispered, "I ran out to him. He was still there."

The Major thought, *Don't break, for God's sake don't. Not while I'm here.*

"Extrapolation," she said. "Everything he saw, he computed and projected. I was dancing. I suppose I was smiling. Wolf never learned to dance, Major. Can you imagine how important that can be to a man who can do anything?

"When I got outside he was just the same as always, quiet and controlled. What he was going through inside, I hate to think. We walked home and the only thing that was said was when I told him I was sorry. He looked at me with such astonishment that I didn't dare say anything else. Two days later he left."

"On the *Starscout*. Didn't you know he was a crew-member?"

"No. I found out later. Wolf had so many skills that he was nine-tenths of a crew all by himself. They'd wanted him for the

longest time, but he'd always refused. I guess because he couldn't bear sharing quarters with someone."

"He did, with you."

"Did he?"

The Major did not answer. She said, "That was going to end. He was sure of that. It could end any time. But space flight's something else again."

"Why did he divorce you?"

She seemed to shake herself awake. "Have I been talking out loud?" she asked.

"What? Yes!"

"Then I've told you."

"Perhaps you have," he conceded. He poised his pencil.

"What are you going to write?" When he would not answer, she said, "Not telling the truth any more, Major?"

"Not now," he said firmly.

For the second time she gave him that searching inspection, really seeing him. "I wonder what you're thinking," she murmured.

He wrote, closed the book and rose. "Thank you very much for coöperating like this," he said stiffly.

She nodded. He picked up his hat and went to the door. He opened it, hesitated, closed it again. "Mrs. Reger —"

She waited, unbelievably still — her body, her mouth.

"In your own words — why did he file suit?"

She almost smiled. "You think my words are better than what you wrote?" Then, soberly, "He saw me dancing and it hurt him. He was shocked to the core. He hadn't known it would hurt. He hadn't realized until then that he loved me. He couldn't face that — he was afraid we might be close. And one day he'd lose his temper, and I'd be dead. So he went out into space."

"Because he loved you."

"Because he loved me enough," she said quietly.

He looked away from her because he must, and saw the report still lying on the coffee table. "I'd better take this along."

"Oh yes, do." She picked it up, handed it to him. "It's the same thing as that story I told you — about the man knocking me down."

"Man — oh. Yes, that one. What was that about?"

"It really happened," she said. "He knocked me down and beat me, right in broad daylight, in front of witnesses, and everything I said about it is true."

"Bastard," growled the Major, and then blushed like a girl. "I'm sorry."

She did smile, this time. "There was a loading-dock there, in front of a warehouse. A piece of machinery in a crate got loose and slid down a chute toward the street. It hit a drum of gasoline and struck a spark. The first thing I knew, I was all over flames.

That man knocked me down and beat them out with his bare hands. He saved my life."

Slowly, his jaw dropped. She said, "It makes a difference, when you know all the facts, doesn't it? Even when the first facts you got are all true?" She rapped the TOP SECRET stamp with her fingernails. "I said this was all a lie. Well, maybe it's all true. But if it is, it's like the first part of that little story. You need the rest of it. I don't. You don't know Wolf Reger. I do. Good bye, Major."

He sat in his office at Headquarters and slowly pounded the fresh copy of his transcribed notes. *I have to send them the way they are*, he thought, and *but I can't. I can't.*

He swore violently and got up. He went to the water-cooler, punched out a paper cup, filled it, and hurled it into the wastebasket. *All I have is facts. She has faith.*

He cursed again and snatched up his briefcase, unlocked it, and took out the secret report. He slammed it down on top of his transcript. *One more look. One more look at the facts.*

He read:

*This is the fourth time I've erased this tape and now I got no time for officialese if I'm going to get it all on here. A tape designed for hull-inspection reports in space wasn't designed for a description of a planetary invasion. But that's what it's got to be. So, for the record, this is Jerry Wain,* Starscout *navigator, captive on one of the cruisers that's going to invade Earth. First contact with extraterrestrials. Supposed to be a great moment in human history. Likely to be one of the last moments too.*

*The* Starscout's *gone and Minelli, Joe Cook, and the Captain are dead. That leaves me and that bastard Reger. The aliens had us bracketed before we knew it, out past Jupiter. They cut up the* 'scout *with some sort of field or something that powdered the hull in lines as broad as your hand. No heat, no impact. Just fine powder, and she fell apart. Joe never got to a suit. The Captain went forward to stay with the ship, I guess, and couldn't have lived long after they sliced the dome off the control room. The three of us got clear and they took us in. They cut Minelli up to see what his guts looked like. I haven't seen Reger but he's alive, all right. Reger, he can take care of himself.*

*I've only seen two of the aliens, or maybe I saw one of 'em twice. If you can imagine a horse-shoe crab made out of blue airfoam, with a wide skirt all the way around it, the whole works about four and a half meters across, that's close. I'm not a biologist, so I guess I can't be much help on the details. That skirt sort of undulates front to back when it moves. I'd say it swims through the air — hop and glide, hop and glide. It can crawl too.*

*First I thought it slid along like a snail but once I saw a whole mess of little legs, some with pincers on them. I don't know how many. Too many, anyhow. No eyes that I could spot, although it must have 'em; it's light in here, grayish, like on a snowfield on an overcast day. It comes from the bulkhead. Floor, too — everywhere.*

*Gravity, on a guess, is about one-sixth Earth. The atmosphere's hot, and seems to be light gases. I cracked my oxy relief valve and struck a spark on it with the back of my glove, and that was pretty spectacular. Hydrogen for sure. Something else that gives an orange cast to the flame. You figure it.*

*The compartment I'm in is altogether bare. There's a transparent oval port on one bulkhead. They can take off like a bullet and stop as if they'd hit a wall. They have some way of cancelling inertia. Or most of it. Riding inside is pretty rough, but coming to a dead stop in two seconds from a thousand k.p.h. or better should butter you all over the walls instead of just slamming you into the bulkhead like it does. They can't operate this inertia field close to a planet — they use wings, and they don't have the right wings. Not for Earth. Not yet.*

*I counted twenty-six ships — sixteen big ones, cruisers I guess you'd call them; two-fifty to three hundred meters long, perfect cylinders. And ten small ones, oblate spheres, thirty meters in diameter.*

*When they brought us in first they slung me in here and nothing happened that I knew about, for sixteen hours. Then that first bug came in through a sort of pucker in the wall that got transparent and spread out and let him through and then bing! the wall was solid again.*

*I guess I went a little crazy. I had my antenna-wrench off the belt-rack and was throwing it almost before I knew what I was doing. I missed. Didn't allow for the gravity, I guess. It went high. The bug sort of humped itself and next thing I knew I couldn't move. I could, inside the space-suit, but the suit was like a single iron casting. It toppled slowly and lay there.*

*The bug slid over to me and hitched up a little — that's when I saw all those little legs — and got everything off my belt — torch, stillson, antenna-reel, everything that would move. It didn't touch my tanks — I guess it knew already about the tanks. From Reger, busy-boy Reger. It took the whole bundle over to the outer bulkhead and all of a sudden there was a square hole there. It dropped my stuff in and the hole went away, and out through the port I could see my stuff flash away from the ship, going like hell. So that's how I found out about the disposal chute.*

*The bug slid away to the other wall and I was going to give it a*

*shot from my heel-jets, but somehow I had sense enough not to. I didn't know what damage they'd do, and I might be able to use 'em later. If anyone's reading this, I did.*

*They don't feed me, and my converters are pretty low. I've rationed my air and water all I could, but it's past conversion now, without a complete recharge, and I'm not likely to get that.*

*This whole time, the ships have been busy. We're in the Belt, I'd guess, without instruments, around 270–20–95. Check those coordinates and hunt a spiral from that center — I'm pretty sure we're near that position. Put infra-red on it; even if they've gone by then, there should be residual heat in these rocks out here. They've leeched onto a big one and it's practically gone now. They make long fast passes back and forth like a metal-planer. I can't see a ray or beam or anything, but the surface flows molten as the ships pass. Mining. I guess they filter the slag some way and distill the metals out. I wouldn't know. I'm a navigator. All I can think of is those ships making passes like that over the Golden Gate and Budapest and LaCrosse, Wisconsin.*

*I found out how to work the disposal chute. Just lean against it. It was a lock with some sort of heavy coils around it, inside, I guess to project refuse away from the ship so it wouldn't orbit.*

*Well, six hours ago a sort of dark spot began to show on the inboard bulkhead. It swelled up until it was a knob about the size of your two fists, shiny black, with some kind of distortion field around it so it was muzzy around the edges. For a while I couldn't figure it at all. I touched it and then took hold of it, and I realized it was vibrating around five hundred cycles, filling my suit with the note. I got my helmet onto it right away.*

*The note went on and then changed pitch some and finally spread out into a noise like a forty-cycle carrier, and something started modulating it, and next thing it was saying my name, flat and raspy, no inflection. An artificial voice, for sure. "Wain," it said, clearing itself up as it went along. "Wain, Wain."*

*So I kept my head tight against it and yelled, "Wain here."*

*It was quiet for a while, just the carrier, and then the voice came in again. I won't bother you with exactly what it sounded like. The language was rugged but clear, like "Wain we no have planet you have planet we take you help."*

*There was a lot of yelling back and forth until I got the picture. And what I want to tell you most is this: once in a while when I listened real carefully I heard another voice, murmuring away. Reger — that I'll swear. It was if this voder, or voice machine, was being run by one of the bugs and Reger*

*was telling it what to say but they wouldn't trust him to talk directly to me.*

*So damn cold-blooded . . . it wasn't us they were after. You clear a patch of wood, you're not trying especially to dispossess the squirrels and the termites. That just happens while you work.*

*For a while I hoped we could maybe do something, but item by item they knocked that out of my head. Reger'd told 'em everything.*

*We're done, that's all.*

*So I asked what's the proposition, and they said they could use me. They didn't really need me, but they could use me. They said I could have anything I wanted on Earth, and all the slaves I could put to work. Slaves.*

*Maybe I shouldn't even try to warn you. Maybe it'll be better if you never know what hit you . . .*

*Reger, he . . . he's . . . ah stick to facts, Wain. Something makes him hate Earth enough to . . . I don't see even a coward doing a thing like this just to save his skin. He has to have some other reason.*

*The bump on the wall said, Reger work with him, you can trust.*

*Yeah, I can trust. I told them what to do with their proposition and shove Reger along after it.*

*Now this is what I am going to do. Try, anyhow. My suit's the only one with a tape recorder, and it's internal. Could be Reger doesn't even know about it. What I'm going to do is wait until this ship starts paring away at the asteroid. It gets up quite a hell of a speed at each pass, more than you'd think, because of the inertialess field. At the sunward end of one pass, I'll go out the chute. I'll have the ship's speed plus the throw-out coils in the chute.*

*I'll gyro around to head for the sun. I've wired the heel-jet starter to my oxy supply. When the oxy stops flowing the jets'll cut in.*

*And I've wired the jets to my distress squealer. When the fuel's all gone the squealer'll cut in.*

*We're positioning over the rock.*

*Don't anybody call me a hero for doing this. I'm not doing it for you. I'm doing it to Reger. That bastard Reger . . .*

*Jimmy Wain here, over and out.*

The Major lifted the flimsies to uncover his own transcript. Coldly it listed the pertinent facts of his interview with the traitor's wife. He read them through again slowly, right through the last paragraph, which said:

SUMMATION: *It is indicated that the subject is a brilliant but twisted individual, and that early influences as noted, plus his mode of life, have induced a morbid fear of himself and a deep distrust of every human being, including his wife. His extrapolative ability plus his vivid imagination seem to have created a certainty in him that he had been betrayed, or that he certainly would*

*be. His actions as reported by Signalman Wain are apparently motivated by a conviction that all his life humanity has tried to anger him so that he will be punished for his anger. This is his opportunity for vengeance without punishment.*

The talker hissed, and a voice said, "Major, the Colonel would like your report on the Reger interview."

"Roger." He caught it up, held it, then slid it into his auto-writer and rapidly tapped out:

*The undersigned wishes to stress the partial nature of the above report, based as it is on the statement of a man under serious strain. Further evidence might conceivably alter the conclusions as stated.*

He signed it and added his rank and section, rolled it, canned it and slapped it into the pneumatic tube.

"Now what the hell did I do that for?" he asked himself. He knew what the answer was. He rose and went to the mirror in the corner by the water-cooler, and peered into it. He shook his head in disgust.

When the ships were sighted, Wain's recording came out of the files and went straight to the wire services. One of the columnists said later that the ensuing roar from earth all but moved the moon out of its orbit.

Without Wain's recording, the alien might have slipped close, or even landed, before the world was alerted.

The ships came single file, faster than any man-made object had ever travelled. They were exactly what Wain had described.

They bore straight in for Earth, their single file presenting the smallest possible profile to Earth radar. (Reger knew radar.) When every known law of spatial ballistics dictated that with that course, at that velocity, they must plunge straight into the planet, they decelerated and swung to take up an orbit — rather, a powered course — around the planet, just out of rocket interceptor range (which Reger knew).

And now their wings could be seen. Telefax and television, newspapers and government agencies researched their contours in minutes. They were familiar enough — a gull-wing design which one aeronautical engineer described as having "every characteristic that could be built into a wing." Each wing, from root to tip, had its own reverse dihedral. Each was sharply tapered, and sharply swept back. Even the little spherical destroyer had them, along with a boom to support the butterfly tail. There was one Earth design almost exactly like it — an extremely stable large-plane airfoil for subsonic use. The designer: Wolf Reger.

The space scouts roared up to challenge them, heavy with armament and anger. They sent a cloud

of missiles ahead of them. There was H.E. and atomics, solid-shot and a whole spectrum of random-frequency radio, just in case.

The radio waves affected the aliens precisely as much — as little as the fusion warheads. Telescopic lenses watched the missiles race to their targets and simply stop there, to slide around the shining hulls and hang there until, one by one, they were brought aboard.

And then the little scouts tried to ram, and were deflected like angling guppies from the sides of an aquarium, to go screaming off into space and a laborious turn.

For three days the enemy circled outside the atmosphere, holding their formation, absorbing or ignoring everything Earth could throw at them.

The Major telephoned Reger's wife to ask if she had removed the name from her mailbox and doorbell. She said indignantly that she had not, would not, and need not. The Major sighed and sent a squad down late that night to arrest her. She was furious. Yet she conceded his point fairly the next morning when she saw the newspaper photographs of her apartment. Even the window-frames were gone. The mob had chopped right through the floor in places, had even heaved the bathtub twelve floors down to the street. "You should know as much about people as you think you know about Wolf Reger," he said.

"You should know as much about Wolf as you do about people," she countered. There was, with her composure, a light he had not seen before.

He kept her in his office. She seemed not to mind. He let her read all the invasion reports as they came in, and he watched every flicker of expression in her face. "When are you going to admit that enough facts are in to show that there's no hero in this story, no one beating out flames?"

"Never. Have you ever been married, Major?"

Sourly, he thought, *Have you?* "No," he said.

"You've loved someone, though?"

He wondered how she kept her features so controlled under stress. He would like to learn that trick.

He said, "Yes."

"Well, then. You only need a few facts about the one you love. Just enough to point the way."

"Three points on a graph to give you a curve, so you can know its characteristics and extend it. Is that what you mean?"

"That's one of the things I mean."

"They call that extrapolation. Your boy's specialty."

"I like that," she said softly. "I like that very much." She detached her eyes from him, from the room, and smiled at what she

saw. "*God!*" he exploded.

"Major!"

"You're going to get clobbered," he said hoarsely. "You're going to get such a kick in the teeth . . . and there isn't a thing in the world I can do about it."

"Poor Major," she said, looking at him as if he were a memory.

There was a click, and electronic noise filled the room. The talker barked, "Enemy spiralling in. Stand by for trajectory."

"Now you'll see." They realized that they had spoken in unison, but it was the wrong time to exchange a smile.

"Arizona!" said the speaker, and "Stand by."

"Stand by hell," growled the Major. "We'll get the fine points by radio. Come on."

"You'll take me?"

"Wouldn't let you out of my sight."

They ran to the elevators, shot to the roof. A helicopter whisked them to the field, and a jet took them in and tore up and out to the lowering sun.

An unbroken cordon can be thrown about a hundred square miles in less than an hour and a half. This is true, because it was done immediately after the alien fleet touched Earth. Once the landing site was determined, the roads writhed with traffic, the desert crawled with men and machines, the air shook with transports, blossomed with parachutes. The ring had not quite closed when the enemy formation came down almost exactly in the predicted center. No longer a single file, the formation was nearly spherical. It arrived on earth with two thunders — one, the terrible crack as the cloven air smashed back to heal itself, and rebounded and smashed again; the other, a shaking of the earth itself.

And the cordon stopped, flattened, lay still as a stain while the furious globe built itself in the desert, flung its coat of many colors about itself, mounted the sky and donned its roiling plumes.

And there were no ships, no aliens, no devils there in the desert, but hell itself.

They saw it from the jet, because they were keeping close radio contact with the landing, and straining their eyes into the sunset for a glimpse of the fleet. Their pilot said he saw them, coming in at an impossible speed. The Major missed them as they blinked by, but he did see their wings, like a flurry of paper over a windy corner, drifting brokenly down. And then the fireball fought the sun and, for a while, defeated it, until it became a leaning ghost in a broad, torn hat.

It seemed a long, long time after that when the Major, his palms tight to his eyes, whispered, "You knew that would happen."

"No I didn't," she whispered back, cathedral-awed. "I only knew *something* would happen."

"Reger did this?"

"Of course." She stirred, glanced at the tower of smoke, and shuddered.

"How?" he murmured. "How?"

He closed his eyes against the lingering glitter of the atom blast, and in his memory saw again those broken, fluttering pieces of wing.

"The wings tore off." To the pilot he said, "Isn't that what happened, Captain?"

"It sure is," said the young man. "And no wonder, sir, the way they flashed in. I've seen that happen before. You can fly under the speed of sound or over it, but you better not stay just *at* it. Looked to me as if they hung on the barrier all the way in."

"All flown from one set of controls . . . probably an automatic pilot, with the course and speed all set up." He looked at the woman. "Reger set it up." Suddenly he shook his head impatiently. "Oh *no!* They wouldn't let him get away with it. Why would they let him deploy their ships?"

"I guess," said the pilot reflectively, "because he made the wings for them, they thought he would know best how to use them."

Mrs. Reger said, "Everything else he told them was true."

"But they'd have known about the barrier. Captain, just what is the speed of sound up in the stratosphere?"

"Depends, sir. At sea level it's around 340 meters per second. Up at 30 kilometers or so it's around 300, depending on the temperature."

"The density?"

"No sir. Most people think that, but it isn't so. The higher the temperature, the higher the speed of sound. Anyway, the sound barrier they talk about is just a convenient term. It happens that shock waves form around a ship anywhere from 85% to 115% of the speed of sound, because some airflow around it is supersonic and some still subsonic and you get real weird flow patterns."

"I see. Captain, could you set up a flight-plan which would keep an aircraft at the buffeting stage from the top of the atmosphere down to the bottom?"

"Imagine I could, sir. Though you wouldn't get much buffeting above 35 kilometers or so. No matter what the sonic speed, the air's too thin for shock wave formation."

"Tell you what. You work out a plan like that. Then radio Radar at Prescott and get the dope on Reger's approach."

"Yes sir." The young man went to work at his chart table.

"It's so *hard* for you," Mrs. Reger said.

"What is?"

"You won't believe it until your little graph's all plotted, with every fact and figure in place. Me, I *know*. I've known all along. It's so easy."

"Hating is easy too," said the Major. "You've probably never done much of that. But *un*hating's a pretty involved process. There's no way of doing it but to learn the facts. The truth."

They were five minutes away from the mushroom when the Captain finished his calculations. "That's it, sir, that's what happened. It couldn't have been an accident. All the way down, under power, those ships stayed within four percent of sonic speed, and tore themselves to pieces. You really think Reger planned that approach, that way, sir?"

"Looks like it. From thirty kilometers to the ground, at that speed . . . it was all over in fifteen seconds."

"Reger," muttered the pilot. He went back to the controls and switched off the automatics. "One of the radar pix showed Reger's space-suit, Major," he said. "Looks like he bailed out same as Wain did — through a disposal chute."

"He's alive!"

"Depends." The young man looked up at the Major. "You think that mob down there is going to wait while we compute velocities for 'em?"

"That's a military setup, Captain. They'll do what they're told."

"About *Reger*, sir?"

He turned his attention to the controls, and the Major went thoughtfully back to his seat. As they whistled down to the airstrip behind the cordon, he suddenly thumped his knee. "Light gases, high temperature —of *course* those bugs never heard of a shock-wave at what we call sonic speed! You see? You see?"

"No," she said. He understood that she did not need to see. She knew.

No ships, no aliens, no invasion. That, apparently, changed nothing. Reger's space-suit had been found — empty. Reger was holed up in the brush, or mingling with the service men and refugees inside the cordon. They were closing the cordon and they would get him. A matter of time, they told him at the command post.

The Major pounded the calculations he had brought. "Damn it, he's innocent, can't you see that?"

The young non-com from Psych Warfare — all the brass was inside the cordon, joining the search — said gently, "Yes, sir, I see it. But you don't know what's going on in there. Too many people have hated that man for too long.

You can't stop 'em with a 'now-hear-this' on the speakers. Even if the soldiers held off, the place is full of civilians and they're foaming at the mouth."

"Nonsense! Orders are orders! By God I'll —"

"Please," said the non-com, "will you go inside and see for yourself?"

The Major glanced back toward the airstrip and the dark jet, where the young pilot stood guard over the woman. "I will," he said. He handed over the tablet. "Take these and do what you can to spread the word."

"Yes *sir*." He walked briskly out into the darkness until the Major was out of sight. "*Me* say anything good about Reger — in *there?*" he murmured. "Not this boy. Some other time." He shoved the papers into his tunic and returned to the CP.

The Major walked quietly through the mob, listening. There were soldiers and Air Force men, security officers and civilians. Behind him, the cordon, tightening, reducing the strip between themselves and the radioactive area. In the cordon, a human gateway: FBI, CIA, G-2, screening. The Major listened.

"He got to be inside somewhere."

"Don't worry, we'll get the —."

"Hey George, tell you what. We get our hands on him, let's keep our mouth shut. Army gets him, it's a trial and all kind of foofaraw. This bunch gets him, they'll tear him to pieces right *now*."

"So?"

"Too quick. You and me, one or two other guys from around here —"

"I hear you."

From somewhere back of the cordon, a tremendous huffing and puffing, and a casual, enormous voice, "Mike hot, Lieutenant," and then the Psycho Warfare officer: "All right, Reger. We know you didn't mean it. No one here will hurt you. You'll get fair treatment all down the line. We understand why you did it. You'll be safe. We'll take care of you. Just step right up."

The space-suit hung grotesquely by its neck against a shattered barn wall. A scraggly man in filthy coveralls stood by a pile of rocks and chunks of four-by-four. "Just three for a dime, gents, and the ladies free. Step right up and clobber the son. Limber up for the real thing. I thank you sir: Hit him hard." A corporal hefted a round stone and let fly. It hit the space-suit in the groin and the crowd roared. The scraggly man chittered, "One on the house, one on the house!" and handed over another stone.

The Major touched a smooth-faced lieutenant on the arm. "What goes on?"

"Huh? The suit, sir? Oh, it's all right. G-2's been and gone. His, all right. He's got to be around some place. Well, it's us or the hot stuff — he can take his choice. The cordon's getting radiation armor."

"There'll be hell to pay over this caper."

A soft voice said, "One look around here, I wish Reger'd gotten away with it."

The Major said warmly, "You're a regular freak around here, mister," and was completely misunderstood. The man ran away, and the Major could have bitten his tongue in two.

*I want to be in a place,* the Major thought suddenly, passionately, *where the truth makes a difference.* And: *If I were a genius at extrapolation, where would I hide?*

"Mr. Reger, you're a reasonable man," bellowed the speaker.

"Three for a dime. For a quarter you can throw a second lootenant."

"He should hold out. He should go back into the bald-spot and fry slowly."

The cordon moved in a foot. *I just thought of the funniest gag,* thought the Major. *You pour vinegar on this sponge, see, and hold it up on this stick . . .*

Slowly he walked back toward the cordon, and then like a warm, growing light, it came to him what he would do if he were a genius at extrapolation, trapped between the advancing wolves and the leaping flames. He'd be a flame, or a wolf. But he couldn't be this kind of a flame. He couldn't be an advancing wolf. He'd have to be a wolf which stayed in one spot and let the advance pass him.

He went and stood by the man. This wasn't the notorious Reger face, hollowed, slender, with the arched nose.

He realized abruptly that the man's nose was broken and not bruised. A man could do that with his own hands if he had to. And a man would have to wear coveralls for weeks to get them that filthy. Say, in a space-suit.

"I'll take three," he said, and handed the man a dime.

"Atta boy, Maje." He handed over two rocks and a billet. The Major aimed carefully, and said from the side of his mouth, "Okay, Reger. We've got to get you out of here."

*And I could be wrong, too,* thought the Major. *Even if he isn't Reger, this mob would tear him to pieces if I so much as pointed my finger.* He hurled his rock at the space-suit. From the side of his mouth, hardly moving his lips, he said, "High temperature, light gases, no barrier. I know what you did. Let me get you out of here."

"One on the house!" bellowed

the barker. "You sure can throw it, Major."

The Major said, softly, "One thing you never extrapolated, genius. Your wife never lost faith. Two billion people hated your guts, but she wouldn't break."

"I can't hear a word you say," said the barker, and yelled, "Each man kills the thing he loves, an' we all love Reger! Come on, lovers!"

*He wants to live*, thought the Major, *but not with her; he thinks he might kill her with that temper. That's why he shipped out in the first place.*

That temper . . .

He hefted the billet of wood. Aiming apparently at the space-suit, but speaking into and over his shoulder, he said, "Fine hunk o' flesh, that woman. I'll have 'er one way or another, but it'll be easier with you out of the way. Come on, damn you, make a break." He started to swing as he spoke.

As long as he lived, he would not forget his microsecond of terror. For the barker sprang at him so fast that he seemed to disappear from where he stood and reappear in midair, teeth bared, claws out. The billet landed heavily on the man's temple, and the Major knew it was a solid blow, knew that consciousness was gone. And the terror existed in that instant before the man's body struck him, for even through unconsciousness the hate went on, twisting the corpse-like features and finishing the animal attack even while the eyeballs were rolling up, the mind darkening.

He let the flailing claws strike him and fall limp, concentrating only on bracing himself so he would not fall, so there would be no scuffle to draw attention. He threw a thick arm around the man's chest and held him upright, walked with him so quickly to the gate in the cordon that the crowd around the space-suit barely had time to turn their heads.

To the FBI man he said, "If it's all the same to you, I'm curtailing this enterprise."

A G-2 lieutenant opened his mouth to protest, glanced at the Major's leaves, and shut his mouth. The FBI man said, "Good idea, Major. That sideshow was pretty stickening. Who is he?"

Recalling the running feud between the Army and his own branch of the Service, the Major glanced at and away from the G-2 man. "One of my own men acting above and beyond the call of duty," he said disgustedly, and shouldered through the opening. The G-2 shavetail ineptly covered up a snicker, and then they were through.

The Major commandeered a jeep and dismissed the driver. They hummed off through the darkness toward the airstrip.

(*Continued on page 129*)

# The Moon and Nonsense

by William P. McGivern

*Probably the only thing around no confidence man could ever hope to sell is the Moon. There are always customers for the Brooklyn Bridge or the jewels in the handkerchief. But nobody would be stupid enough to buy the Moon.*

*Oh no? Did you ever hear of a man named Reggie Van Ameringen?*

THE MOOD of the new day was rather peculiar, and it warned Reggie van Ameringen that this particular day was somewhat different from the usual parcels of time in which he thrived like a happy vegetable. Clive was smiling slightly for one thing, and there was a certain expansiveness in his manner as he went about the business of setting up breakfast by the sunny windows.

Reggie sat up in bed and studied Clive with a shrewd eye. Smiling, not a doubt of it, Reggie thought. The old lips twisted upward, a definite jolliness in the usually glassy eyes. It was damned odd. A smile on Clive's face was as shocking as a mustache on the Mona Lisa. For Clive was a gentlemen's gentleman in the heroic tradition, a bravura anachroism from a sterner age. He had the figure of a Guardsman, the manner of a Duke, and a sense of propriety that would have awed a director of the Bank of England.

"I say!" Reggie said.

"Ah, good morning, sir. You slept well, I trust?"

"Top hole," Reggie said, still vainly attempting to analyze Clive's air of incongruous *bonhomie*. There was, he knew, little hope of finding out. For Reggie's was not an analytical mind; in fact he secretly wondered if it was a mind at all. Obviously, it was *something*, but what he was not sure. And it was a subject he didn't enjoy peering into. He had come to grips with his mind and settle the matter. To hell with it, had been his final conclusion. Let sleeping minds lie, and all the rest of it.

"I say!" he said once more.

"Yes, sir?" Clive paused in the

act of putting down a fork.

"You're in good form, what?" Reggie said, attacking the puzzle obliquely.

"Why thank you, sir," Clive said, and placed the fork exactly one-and-one-eighth inch from the plate.

"Bounded out of the right side of the old bed, eh?"

"Quite, sir."

"Always do, don't you? I mean, bound of the right side of the old downy."

"Oh yes, sir. The bed, you see, is against the wall."

Reggie frowned, peering into the remark for significance. Finding none, he sighed and climbed out of bed. Then he got the joke. It was quite a time before he could bring himself to stop laughing. And by then he had shaved, showered and finished his breakfast.

But over his second cup of coffee he remembered what had been bothering him before Clive's uproarious sally had knocked him completely out of control.

"I say!" he said for the third time, and pointed a fork accusingly at Clive's chest.

"Yes, sir?"

"You were smiling this morning."

"Perhaps I was, sir. It's a rather special day, I think. Or have you forgotten?"

"Forgotten what? Don't beat about the old bush."

"The lawyers are coming this morning, sir. It's your twenty-sixth birthday, and today you will inherit the money which has been held in trust for you by the firm of Godpenny, Overreach, Hensdrake and Wellington. It is a day that calls for a certain levity, sir."

"Yes, of course, of course," Reggie said peevishly. He *had* forgotten the whole business, and remembering it was enough to envelop his spirits in a vast dank pall. Lawyers! Godpenny, Overreach, Hensdrake and Wellington — the names were a litany of disaster, an awesome echo of past flubs and foibles. Every bit of unpleasantness in his life had been connected with lawyers. They were always lecturing him, treating him as if he didn't have enough sense to come in out of the rain. As a matter of fact, Reggie recalled, they *did* have a point in that particular instance. He and his boon friend Ferdy Myrtlehead had been involved in that business — actually it had all been Ferdy's fault. But the lawyers for all their talk of justice couldn't see it that way. It had started with a cheery talk at the club bar about coming in out of the rain. Ferdy had scored a smashing stroke by saying that the remark made no sense, because whether or not people came *in* out of the rain it always *stopped*

raining eventually and therefore the end results were identical. Come *in* or stay *out* was all the same. You got dry either way. Reggie hadn't agreed. And so they had packed a lunch containing two thermos bottles of Martinis and repaired to the park to wait for rain. On the first try Ferdy's theory was completely vindicated. They sat in the rain for four hours while Reggie grew increasingly giddy with the prospect of showing Ferdy up as cotton-headed young ass. But then, humiliatingly, the rain stopped, and Ferdy's point was proven.

"You see, old man," Ferdy had said, in a nauseatingly sympathetic manner, "You aren't grounded in good old logic. But observe: the rain has stopped, the sun is out, in a matter of an hour or so we will be dry. Therefore, the remark, about not having enough sense to come out of the rain is just a lot of empty nonsense. Handed down from father to son like stories about kind fairies and pots of gold under rainbows. Just a fake, that's all."

"I don't know about fairies," Reggie said, stung.

"*Kind* fairies," Ferdy said sharply. "Everyone knows about fairies. But no kind ones. Not one bloody kind fairy in the whole world."

But Reggie hadn't taken the experiment in the park as conclusive, and for several years he had worked diligently to prove that Ferdy was wrong. The two of them had travelled quite a bit — particularly in India — trying to find a place where it never stopped raining. And Reggie, hating himself for a sneak, even got mixed-up with some rainmakers in various countries. He had been on the verge of exposing Ferdy as an arrant, un-schooled pop-off when the lawyers — *all* of them — had caught him in a market in Port Said. What followed was a nightmarish business, full of name-calling and recrimination. It had left Reggie moody for hours. And now they were upon him once more, trapping him here in his own sanctum.

"You don't seem pleased, if I may say so, sir," Clive remarked.

"Say it a hundred times," Reggie said, gnawing at his lip. "What're they up to now?"

"They merely require your signature on a few forms," Clive said. "And then, until noon, you will be a millionaire. May I congratulate you, sir."

"Until noon?"

"Quite, sir. Another firm of lawyers — Muddle, Shackhead, Toobottom, Egbert, Clarkson, Lessfit and Neverplay—will be in charge of your finances."

"Why the old switcheroo?"

Clive cleared his throat elegantly. "Taking an advantage of

a technicality, Godpenny, Overreach, Hensdrake and Wellington are resigning as your legal custodians."

"Dropping me, eh?" Reggie muttered. For some reason he didn't feel as elated as he should have; it wasn't cheery to be thrown away by a pack of lawyers. "I suppose they think I'm not good enough for them," he said, gesturing moodily with a piece of buttered toast.

"I shouldn't put it that way, sir," Clive said kindly. "However, as an old and respectable firm, I feel they may not be spiritually equipped to manage the — ah — livelier aspects of your affairs."

"Of course," Reggie said. He hadn't the foggiest notion of what Clive was talking about, but the cadence of Clive's prose and the melifluous tone of his voice soothed him like the strains of beautiful music.

"I think a glass of champagne might be in order, sir," Clive went on. "If that is agreeable to you, I'll chill a bottle now."

"Fine, grand," Reggie said. The morning was picking up, he thought, returning to his usual state of bland and mindless good humor. "I'll pop into the old threads meanwhile."

"Very well, sir."

When he had dressed himself Reggie strolled into the drawing room. Everything looked top-hole; the sun was shining smartly through the terrace windows and Clive had brought all the bric-a-brac up to a state of high gloss. It was a grand room really, he thought. View of the park, comfortable chairs, all the rest of it. Strolling about he patted a table and sofa affectionately. Good old friends, he was thinking. Stout and true. Like Ferdy. Like — He paused, a small frown gathering on his pleasantly vacant features. Like whom? The name — whose ever it had been — had just popped out of his mind. Who was it? Reggie felt a twinge of dismay. Hardly a way to treat a stout and true friend. Forget all about him. A chap didn't have *that* many friends. Devil of a note. Losing friends as if they were carkeys or postage stamps. Reggie put a hand to his forehead, weighted down by a sudden and definite sense of less. "I may have lost my stoutest friend," he muttered to the floor. "Good old whoever-it-was, gone forever." Sighing he threw both hands in the air. "Well, farewell old bean, nothing to do but carry on, bite the bullet," he said, making an effort to dismiss the gloomy business.

It was then the doorbell rang. Reggie hurried to answer it and found his fiance, Sari, standing in the corridor. And when he saw her a dazzling light broke on him. *She* was the stout old friend he'd

forgot, *she* was the true-blue buddy he'd thought he'd lost.

"Ah, welcome back," he said, embracing her fondly.

Sari kissed him on the cheek and then drew back and looked at him with a small but sceptical smile. "Am I supposed to have been away?" she said.

"Yes, it was all very tragic," Reggie said, taking her by the arm and leading her to a chair. "You see, I forget your name. Silly of me, but there it is."

"How droll," Sari said lightly. "Has it come back to you now?"

"But of course," Reggie said, highly pleased with himself. "I was thinking of these stout old chairs and tables in this room, and that made me think of my best friends. Well, Ferdy came first, naturally, and —"

"Naturally Ferdy was first," Sari said, nodding pleasantly.

"Of course. Then I thought of another great old friend, but the name just wouldn't come. But it was *you!* Hilarious, what?"

Sari drummed her fingers on the arms of the chair and studied Reggie with an Inquisitor's smile. "I am going to count up to ten," she said slowly and distinctly.

"That's an awfully good trick," Reggie said and sighed. "I've tried it, but six and seven get me all tangled up."

Sari was a small, and elegantly curved young woman with vivid red hair and green eyes. In spite of her pocket-sized specifications she had a temper and intelligence that could lend her the stature of a female Goliath. And now, as she crossed her slim, exquisitely, molded legs and looked up at Reggie, he had the odd sensation that she was looking *down* on him.

"You couldn't remember my name," she said thoughtfully. "Ferdy's yes, mine no. You forgot old true-blue Sari, Eh?"

"Just for a few minutes," Reggie said scratching his head. He had a vague feeling that something was wrong. "It's not serious, really. Sometimes I forget *my* name. Damned nuisance. It always happened in the army. At roll call."

"I won't be side-tracked," Sari said.

"Not side-tracking you. Just telling you I couldn't remember my name at roll call."

"Well, what in Heaven's name did you do?"

"I yelled 'Here' to every name. Only thing to do. Couldn't take a chance." Reggie chuckled and sat down on the arm of Sari's chair. "Funniest thing was my outfit didn't have an AWOL all the time I was there. Fellows were over the hill for days, weeks, but there was old Reggie shouting out a 'Here' for them. Ran up a perfect record. Company Commander got a citation. Ill wind and the rest of it, what?"

Sari tried very hard not to

## STATEMENT

**REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION**

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G. E. CARNEY, *Business Manager.*

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 24th day of September, 1953.

[SEAL] HELENE BULLOCK, *Notary Public.*

(My commission expires March 30, 1955.)

"Sorry, sir—no browsing in the occult section."

laugh, but she gave up the struggle after a few seconds. "I don't know what it is," she said, patting his cheek. "I really don't know. Sometimes I think to myself, 'You are nuttier than he is if you marry him,' but I can't take myself seriously. How do you do it, Reggie? Do you drop some kind of pills in my cocktails?"

Reggie didn't know what she was talking about, but this was one of the things he liked about Sari, and all girls for that matter — their dear, bubbling little feminine minds. "Come, come now," he said, which was a phrase he had been using successfully for years in moments of confusion.

"All right, we won't quibble," Sari said. "When are the lawyers arriving, by the way? That's why I'm here, you know. I want to look at a millionaire in the flesh, even if he's going to disappear at noon sharp, like a daytime Cinderella."

"Oh, they'll be along pretty soon, I suppose. Look, Sari, you've got a good head for figures. Counting up to ten is no mean trick, eh? Well, how about this? *Why* won't they let me keep my million dollars?"

Sari smiled at him. "I wouldn't worry about it. They'll probably explain all that to you, in any case."

Sari's words were prophetic. The Messrs. Godpenny, Overreach, Hensdrake and Wellington arrived ten minutes later, and five minutes after Clive had taken their black Homburgs and black overcoats, the president of the firm — Darius Godpenny — was providing clues to Reggie's query.

"Your worthy grandfather did not think that you should be intrusted with the sum of one million dollars," Godpenny said, wagging his spectacles at Reggie. Darius Godpenny was a small, compactly built man in his middle-fifties, with neat gray hair, a high unfurrowed forehead, and a look about the eyes that is peculiar to financial Peeping Toms. "In truth, your grandfather did not feel that you were equipped to manage *one* dollar, let alone one million," he went on with relish. "In his opinion you were *non compos mentis*."

"Is that a direct quote?" Sari asked coldly. "Did the old boy usually chat with you in Latin?"

Godpenny gave her a severe glance. "I took the liberty, the poetic license, you might away, of putting his words in an older and more succinct tongue."

"You're liable to get your poetic license revoked," Sari muttered.

"To continue," Godpenny said, clearing his throat. "I must say that our firm has found your grandfather's estimate of you, rather temperate. In the thirteen years we have managed your af-

fairs there has been nothing but one crisis after another, and all of them have been precipitated by your apalling lack of responsibility and judgment. Short of theft, I can think of no fiscal impropriety you have not committed."

"That must worry the old boy," Reggie said moodily. "That theft business, I mean. He was a great old thief. Mines, railroads, whole states, he slipped 'em into his pocket when no one was looking. Great old boy. Wonderful touch for larceny. He's probably stewing about bad blood in the family. No more thieves. Whole line going to pot."

Godpenny drew himself up to his full and unimpressive height. "Your grandfather was one of the pioneers who built this country, young man."

"That's right," Reggie said, shaking his head. "Great old boy. You know, he once stole a hot stove from the Union League club, because he heard someone say he'd stolen everything *but* a hot stove. Full of pride. That was grandfather."

"I think it best to terminate our business," Godpenny said, after gnawing at his lips for a few seconds in silence. "Sign this form here, here and here, if you please."

"Righto," Reggie said.

When the lawyers had filed out Reggie turned and patted Sari on the cheek. "Thankgoodness that's over," he said. "Terrible strain."

"You were just wonderful, and I hated those nasty little men," Sari said.

Clive entered the room with a tray of glasses and a definitely gay smile on his noble face. "Champagne, sir," he announced in tones of pure gold . . .

"Well, you've still got ten minutes left," Sari said, a good bit later. "The new lawyers will take over at noon."

"I wish I could buy you one little present first," Reggie said.

"Never mind, I only want the moon with a fence around it," Sari said fondly. "You can pick that up anytime."

They were sitting on the sofa before the fire, cosily holding hands. Sari's red head rested against Reggie's shoulder, and her expression was dreaming and peaceful.

"You know, money doesn't make any difference," Reggie said.

"Not to me it doesn't," Sari said, hugging his arm.

"But look," Reggie said. "I always live the same way. But sometimes Clive says we're stony, and other times he's actually cheerful about the old ready. But nothing ever changes. So how does he *know?*"

"Clive's a genius," Sari said cheerfully. "He just knows."

"No doubt of that. Supposing I go find another bottle of the old

bubbly? Thirsty business, talking."

"What an unexpected but heavenly thought!"

Reggie patted her silken knee. "Wait right here. I want to explore this money thing." He patted her knee absently. "Or *something*. Funny. Slipped my mind. But I'll try to remember."

"I'll help you," Sari said. "Go get the old bubbly, to use your fine and noble phrase."

Reggie found a bottle of champagne waiting for him in an ice bucket. He was loosening the stopper when an anxious knock sounded on the back door. Reggie hesitated, then sighed and opened the door. Ferdie Myrtlehead stood in the corridor, a tipsy little smile on his round and foolish face.

"Reggie, old bean," he said.

"What ho!" Reggie said. He wasn't surprised to find Ferdie at the rear door. Ferdie had a quirk about front doors, he knew. The idiosyncrasy dated to his youth; as a teen-ager he had read of a trapper who was killed by a shotgun that was rigged up to the front door of a cabin. That had done it for Ferdie. No more barging through front doors.

Ferdie smiled at the bottle of champagne. "I say, the old bubbly," he murmured. "Saving it for anything special?"

Reggie thought a moment. "Well, no," he said.

"Grand. Let's have a touch."

"Righto."

They sat down at the kitchen table and had a pleasant, ruminative drink. "Well, well," Ferdie said.

"Quite," Reggie nodded.

Ferdie scratched his head. "I had something to tell you," he said. "Hurried over from the club. But it's gone."

"Well, have a drink. Sometimes a boost like that helps."

"Righto."

After the second drink Ferdie snapped his fingers. His pink and plump face relaxed into a smile. "Ah, yes," he said. "You remember my Uncle Algernon?"

"Well, no."

"I've told you about him anyway. A rare old crackpot. Thinks horses are plotting to overthrow society. Really! Mad as a loon. Always attacking poor old nags pulling milk wagons. Filthy rows with judges all over the country for trying to run horses down in his car. Goes to western movies and cheers when horses are shot." Ferdie chuckled and slapped Reggie on the shoulder. "Quite a peppy old character."

"Sounds great," Reggie said approvingly.

"Well, he just popped into the club. That's why I came over here. Thought you'd like to meet him."

"I say, that was decent of you," Reggie said, touched by Ferdie's generosity.

"Well, let's be off then."

At twelve o'clock the six lawyers from the new firm arrived at Reggie's front door. Clive let them in, took their hats and coats, and then glanced inquiringly at Sari, who was still seated on the sofa before the fire.

"Excuse me, but have you seen the master?" he asked her.

"Reggie? He went out to the kitchen a while ago to get a bottle of champagne. Didn't you see him?"

"I was in my room doing the accounts," Clive said. His voice was even and deep, but its timbre suggested the battlefield rather than the drawingroom. "Excuse me, I'll tell him the lawyers are here."

In twenty seconds he re-entered the room. "Won't you sit down?" he said to the attorneys. "There may be a slight delay."

Sari sat up abruptly. She stared at Clive and shook her head slowly, incredulously. "No, it's not true," she said. "Tell me it's a joke, Clive."

Clive raised his eyebrows a quarter-of-an-inch, which was sufficient to indicate what he thought of the propriety of a gentleman's gentleman "joking." "The Master has gone out it appears," he said.

Sari swallowed a vast apprehension. "And he's worth — I mean, he can spend — it's *all* his to do with as he wants?"

"Precisely," Clive said calmly.

Reggie and Ferdie decided that it would require a few stiff pegs of liquor to ease their disappointment, and they promptly began to utilize that therapy. Their disappointment stemmed from the fact that Uncle Algernon had left the club several minutes before they arrived. A neighing horse in the street had sent him charging out to the sidewalk, blackthorn staff raised to strike, and the last that was seen of him (according to the doorman) was his coattails flapping out of sight around a corner.

"Next time better luck," Ferdie said moodily.

"Dashed bitter let down," Reggie said. Then his spirits lifted. "Well, things aren't too bad. I mean, long quiet afternoon facing us. Nothing to do but chat, have a drink, all the rest of it. Not too bad, eh?"

It was several minutes later that two substantial looking gentlemen stepped up to the bar alongside Reggie and ordered Scotch and sodas. Without meaning to eavesdrop, Reggie heard some of their conversation, which revolved about money in large and impressive amounts.

Finally the man nearest him — a large and handsomely tailored chap with white hair and benignly sharp eyes — put a hand on Reggie's arm, and said, "Excuse me, but my friend has just told me a story that's too good to

confine to a limited audience. I'd like to give it the circulation it deserves if you don't mind."

"Not at all," Reggie said. He waved to the bartender for a round of drinks, immensely flattered that the man had spoken to him; usually the respectable members of the club treated him with a toleration which he found very depressing.

"Well, it's like this," the man said, fingering his glass. "I'm in the investment business by the way. Names Harrington. My friend here is Dr. Iseminger, of whom you've probably heard."

There was a general handshaking at this point, and a muttering of names and how-are-you's. Ferdie crowded in shamelessly, to Reggie's annoyance. But his annoyance faded very quickly, particularly when he recalled how sporting Ferdie had been about Uncle Algernon.

"Well, it's this way," the man who called himself Harrington said. "My friend, the good doctor, is not a business man, but he nevertheless invests a certain part of his income in good stocks. This morning he called me at my office and, since we're old friends, I talked to him personally."

Dr. Iseminger, a neatly dressed little man with sparse gray hair and thoughtful eyes, was shaking his head and smiling sheepishly as Harrington began the story.

"It seemed," Harrington went on, chuckling good-humoredly, "that the doctor wanted a hundred shares of Western Consolidated. He had read the prospectus of this company's assets and so forth, and thought it would make a fine investment. A touch speculative, but basically sound, you understand."

"I say!" Reggie said.

"However, *I* didn't like Western Consolidated," Harrington went on. "I know the company well, and I know the chaps who took over the reorganization two years ago. And it seemed to me that caution was indicated. A few more months to see how things shaped up, and so forth. But the good doctor was impatient. 'Buy it now!' he ordered, and I reluctantly agreed to do so."

Harrington sipped his drink and then laughed aloud, a good hearty, one-man-to-another laugh. "Well, Western Consolidated split their stock today and just about doubled the doctor's money for him. But the hilarious thing is this," Harrington went on, putting a big, beautifully manicured hand on Reggie's shoulder. "The joke is that the doctor actually wanted to buy *Eastern* Consolidated, quite another company, and got the names mixed up. So what can you do? I ask you, what can you do?"

"Hmmmm," Reggie said, understand nothing of all this, but realizing that some issue was

being put squarely to him. He hedged cleverly. "Hmmmmm," he said.

"Exactly," Harrington cried. "What can you do in the market when you make money even by accident?"

"I say, is it really that easy?" Ferdy said.

"Oh, I don't mean to be taken literally," Harrington said. But with good sound advice it's not too difficult a matter. Intelligent men are adding to their capital every day. It's an interesting time, a highly interesting time, I might say, for a man with surplus cash to invest. If I had a million dollars —"

"I have a million dollars," Reggie said conversationally. "Just got it today."

Harrington smiled at him. "Would you like to have two?"

"Well, no thanks," Reggie said.

"Sensible man," Harrington said. "You know when to stop." He glanced at his watch and shrugged. "Well, I'm stuck for an hour or so. The Governor warned me he might be late. What do you say we take a table? Might even have another round of drinks?"

They repaired to a mahogany table in the corner of the lounge and their waiter brought them fresh drinks. In the next half-hour they had quite a few drinks. Reggie and Ferdie were vastly over-stimulated by the respectability of their companions, and went hog-wild in sheer exuberance. Ferdie at last excused him to go to the bathroom and Dr. Esiminger followed him. The doctor returned alone. He nodded to Harrington who moved his glass aside and put a firm fatherly hand on Reggie's arm.

"Your friend isn't coming back," he said. "I think he's been taken ill."

"Pity," Reggie said, blinking a bit. "Chap should watch his health, what?"

"Precisely. However, I must say I'm gratified at the chance to talk to you in private. Unless I'm way off, you're a shrewd and careful operator. Now be honest with me: is that a fair estimate?"

"Well," Reggie said, "I'm not very clever, if that's what you mean."

"Sly dog!" Harrington chuckled. "But to be serious: I have a little deal you might be interested in. Just listen a moment."

Harrington talked persuasively for at least half-an-hour, describing the potential of an oil well in southwestern Texas. Figures flowed easily and hypothetically from him, each digit blessed by the tone of benediction in his big rolling voice. Finally he paused and looked solemnly at Reggie. "Well, what do you think?"

"Preposterous," Reggie said, nodding. "Silly business, expecting to get oil out of the ground

and make buckets of money with it. Couldn't agree more."

Harrington's smile became slightly strained. He glanced quickly at the doctor and then took a handkerchief and mopped his damp forehead. "You *are* a sly one," he said, patting Reggie's shoulder. "But joking aside, I'd like your views on this matter. If a man wanted to turn a million dollars into five or even ten million dollars, this is the quickest way to do it. Don't you agree?"

"Well, I suppose so," Reggie said. He was getting very bored; what had begun as a pleasant afternoon of guzzling had turned into a lot of silly chatter about oil wells and interest rates.

Harrington leaned closer to Reggie. "I like you," he said. "I'm going to cut you in on this deal. I'm going to take your million dollars and do tricks with it. I'll make ten dollars for ever one you invest — or my name isn't George Worthington."

"Harrington," Reggie said, pleased at his alertness.

Harrington coughed strenuously. "Ah, to be sure. Harrington. George Harrington. Silly slip. Well, what do you say?"

"Oh, anything that pops into my mind as a rule," Reggie said. "No set rules about it. Just say something. Anything."

"I mean, what do you say about *this* particular deal?" Harrington said in a rising voice.

"Oh." Reggie frowned and drummed his fingers on the table. "Well, let me see." He stared in glassy absorption at the wall. Then he shook his head. "Sorry, old bean. Don't need more millions. Just get involved with more lawyers. Bloody mess." He shuddered and waved to a waiter. "Need a drink here. Drink all around." Then he patted Harrington's shoulder. "Good of you to think of me. Remember it all my life."

"You can't be serious!" Harrington said.

"No law against it," Reggie said. "Free country, what?"

"But isn't there *anything* you want?"

"Yes, but it's a bigish order," Reggie said, and sighed. He had suddenly thought of Sari. Grand and amazing girl. And how did he treat her? Like a cad. No other word for it. She wanted the moon with a fence around it, that was all, and he hadn't stirred a finger to see about it. The only thing she'd ever asked him for, and what had he done? Nothing. Hadn't given it a thought. "I'd like the moon," he said to Harrington, speaking crisply and decisively. "Not for myself, understand, but for a good old friend."

Harrington and the doctor stared at each other for a second in silence. Then the doctor shook his head quickly. He had become quite pale. "No," he said. "No."

But Harrington suddenly pounded the table and began to laugh. He stared at Reggie and said, "This is the most amazing coincidence! Dr. Iseminger *owns* the moon. He's got a pure and uncontestable title."

"I say," Reggie murmured. He looked at the doctor and said wistfully, "I don't suppose you'd care to sell it?" . . .

Events moved swiftly and bewildering after this. Harrington insisted they go to his hotel room to discuss the whole matter in peace and quiet. But there wasn't any peace and quiet at Harrington's hotel. Instead there were powerful drinks, and a tall brunette who looked as if she might have played fullback on some team of Amazons. She took an instant fancy to Reggie. There was nothing she wouldn't do for him, she hinted with a twist of her heroic shoulders.

There was a lot of talk about the moon, and a gala moment as Reggie signed a check and received a receipt.

After that things calmed down. The doctor left with the check, and Harrington began stuffing things into a suitcase. Reggie and the tall brunette played a game of hide-and-seek which terminated with Reggie hidden away artfully in a closet. He fooled her completely; a whole hour went by and when he finally tip-toed out into the bedroom the silence struck him as unnatural. That was when he learned that he was alone, that Harrington, the doctor and the brunette had vanished.

Reggie felt very sad and very sleepy. Find a grand bunch of friends, lose 'em the same day. Life! And all the rest of it. Sighing, he stretched out on the sofa and fell fast asleep.

When he woke several hours later he realized that he was in possession of an epic hangover. Gloomy and depressed he stared about the strange room, at the empty glasses and overflowing ashtrays. His memory, always an antic instrument, was little help to him; he recalled missing Ferdie's uncle at the club, and a vague something about bringing Sari a drink. The last splintering thought filled him with remorse. He'd stood Sari up somewhere. Fine way to treat true-blue Sari, he mused. Well, best set things straight. Off to the old homestead in sackcloth and ashes. Bend the bloody head and beg forgiveness. Least a chap could do.

It wasn't until he was zipping homeward in a cab that he remembered the business about the moon. He began to chuckle. Yes, he'd bought the moon. For Sari. That would put a sparkle in her eye. No need for sackcloth and ashes. Hail the conquering Hero!

When he entered his apartment Sari was pacing the floor, wringing

her hands together anxiously.

"Oh dear, are you all right?" she said breathlessly. "We've been so worried. Clive's out at the police stations, and the lawyers buzzed off hours ago."

"I'm tip-top," Reggie said.

"You look hung."

"Well, a bit maybe. Nothing serious. A clacking in the old forehead."

"Where *were* you?"

"Shopping," Reggie said with a casual little wave of his hand. "Just shopping."

"Reggie, did you spend any money?"

He smiled and patted her shoulder. "No question for a dear little female to bother her head about. I brought you a present. Just a little thing. But cute."

"What did you buy me?"

Reggie took her hand and led her to the window. "Look," he said, pointing to the sky. "There! It's all yours."

"What *are* you talking about?"

"The moon. I bought it for you. That's what you wanted, right?"

"Darling, I'm in no mood for jokes."

"No joke. Girl wants the moon with a fence around it. What's a doting chap to do? Simple. Get the moon. No fence yet. Have to see about carpenters, I suppose."

Sari looked at him for a few seconds. Then she said quietly, "Reggie, *who* sold you the moon?"

"Couple of chaps. Good fellows."

"What did you pay them?"

"All I had. Moons don't come cheap. Million dollars."

A key sounded in the door and Clive entered. "Good evening, sir," he said pleasantly to Reggie. "I've been taking the liberty of trying to find you."

"Clive!" Sari cried. "Make him tell you what he did."

Reggie was feeling defensive and confused. And a little bit hurt. Sari's reaction wasn't what he'd expected. No wildly grateful hug, no flush of pride and pleasure at the gift.

Clive looked at Reggie. "What have you done, sir?" he asked politely.

"I bought her the moon," Reggie said moodily. "From a couple of chaps. Paid a million. What's all the fuss about?"

Clive swallowed hard. For an instant there was quite definitely an expression of horror on his face. Then he recovered himself. "Congratulations, sir," he said stiffly.

Sari began to weep. And through her tears, she said, "Reggie, I can't take anymore. I'm through. You got drunk and squandered your money. I don't care about the money, but I can't face life with a madman. Supposing we had children? You might sell them or give them away to someone at the club."

"Good bunch at the club,"

Reggie said weakly. "Take good care of the tots. Nothing to worry about."

Sari shook her head blindly and ran to the door.

"Wait," Reggie cried.

But the door slammed and Sari was gone.

The silence that followed was thick and oppressive. Reggie went to the windows and looked long and thoughtfully at the moon. Nothing wrong with it. Perfectly good moon. Fine color. Reggie rubbed his long vacant face. But you couldn't buy and sell it. Definitely not. He wasn't sure why, but he knew this to be so. Any fool should know that much.

When he turned Clive was regarding him gravely.

"Pretty silly business," Reggie said, trying for a light touch. He laughed, but the sound of it was hollow and false. "I guess I'm a bit of an ass, eh what?"

"Not a *bit*, sir," Olive said cryptically.

Several hours later the household had returned to something approaching normality; Reggie was sound asleep and Clive was doing the silver. It was then — at nine-thirty — that the front doorbell rang shrilly.

A lesser man that Clive might have been intimidated by the three men who stood in the corridor. Two of them were in military uniform, and the stars on their shoulders indicated that their rank was but one shade below the chief of staff. The man between them wore a black Chesterfield overcoat and a black Homburg. He was in his early sixties, but his face was smoothly tanned and his cold gray eyes were sharp and alert. And something in the manner of the general officers made it plain that he was solely and completely in command of the group.

"Yes?" Clive said quietly, and in the voice he would have used with a door-to-door magazine salesman.

The man with the Homburg glanced at a card in his hand. "Is this the home of Reginald van Ameringen?"

"Yes, sir."

"We'd like to see him."

"Whom shall I say is calling?"

"Tell him Mr. Smith from the Department of State," said the man in the Homburg drily.

"Very well. Won't you come in, gentlemen?"

At the door Clive paused and glanced back at the three men. "I should like to tell you that Mr. van Ameringen has recently undergone a most upsetting experience," he said. "And, considering that, it might be wise if you gave me some inkling of your business."

"I would prefer to discuss that privately with Mr. Ameringen," Mr. Smith said.

Clive hesitated an instant. Then

he said, "Mr. van Ameringen is an — ah — unusual young man. And on occasion I have noticed that he takes information from me in a happier mood than he does from strangers. And therefore —"

"Now see here," one of the Generals said shortly, "we want to see him alone, and right away. So be good enough to tell him that please."

Clive looked at the General for an instant. "Very well, sir," he said softly, and left the room.

Reggie was in an extremely fragile mood as he met the three gentlemen in his drawing room. For one thing, his head was still throbbing ominously, and there was a distinct flutter in the region of his stomach. But more debilitating was his conviction that he had played for a limp-brained fool in the business of the moon. And on top of this Sari was gone forever. It was, all in all, enough to make a chap feel low.

"You're Mr. van Ameringen?" Mr. Smith asked him.

"That's right," Reggie said listlessly. He didn't care for the way the two blokes in the doormen's uniforms were peering at him — as if he were some dangerous freak.

"I understand you bought the moon this afternoon," Mr. Smith said.

Reggie started. Then he laughed weakly. "All a lot of nonsense. Nothing to it."

"This is a very grave business. Tell me this: do you know who I am?"

Reggie looked carefully at Mr. Smith and he shook his head.

"You've never seen me before? On television, or in the newspapers?"

"Sorry, old chap." Reggie felt relieved to have got away from the moon. "Don't have a television set, and I'm not sure I can read. Sometimes the old words make sense, other times they don't. How about a drink, eh?"

"I want you to listen most carefully to me," Mr. Smith said. "The United States has worked for three years to prepare and send a ship to the moon. That mission was completed this afternoon at two o'clock. The moon is inhabited by a gentle and gracious race of what, I suppose, we should call people. They were happy to welcome our emissaries, but they insisted that they — and their continent — had been sold to a person on Earth. How they learned of this, I'm not sure. But they are highly principled people — though naive as children — and they refuse to allow to investigate their country until we have a title to the place from the original purchaser. Do you understand what this means?"

Reggie nodded slowly. "Means you don't want a drink, eh?"

"You bought the moon," Mr.

Smith said sharply. "We can't make any investigation there unless you sell it to us. I don't know how or why you bought it — but I know this; unless we can settle the matter tactfully the United States is going to appear as a ruthless predator in the eyes of the world. Do you understand what I'm telling you?"

"Why, of course," Reggie said. An atavistic cunning, perhaps inherited from his grandfather, had come to his aid. "Perfectly clear business," he said, nodding quickly. He knew that he must get away from these men. Nothing but trouble came from chatting with men who wanted to buy or sell the moon. He'd learned *that* much from today's lesson. "Tell you what," he said, "I need a drink. Won't be a minute. Pop into the old kitchen and mix-up something. Don't stir."

And with that Reggie fled from the room. It didn't take him a minute to get out the backdoor, down the stairs, and into the welcome normality of a traffic jam. Popping into a cab he settled back against the cushions with a sigh of relief. He told the driver to take him to his only sanctuary, the club. . . .

"He seems to have gone out, sir," Clive told Mr. Smith ten minutes later.

"Out?" Mr. Smith cried. For an instant his composure deserted him completely; he paced aimlessly while the Generals stared at Clive with their mouths open.

"Why would he do that?" Mr. Smith demanded at last. "Why in the name of Heaven would he jeopardize the security of the most important —" Mr. Smith paused and looked at Clive. "Do you know what I'm talking about?"

"Yes, sir."

"Our voices carried?" Mr. Smith asked him with a little smile.

"You describe it euphemistically, sir."

"I daresay we should have listened to you from the start," Mr. Smith said. "Your young master is — ah — unusual. Where can we find him now?"

"He'll be in the men's bar of his club."

Mr. Smith tugged at the lobe of his ear. Then he said, "Do you know who I am?"

"Yes, sir."

"You've seen my pictures in the paper? I'm not pressing the point out of vanity, I assure you. It's merely that I want you to understand the gravity of this affair."

"I think I understand," Clive said. "And it is not from the rotogravures that I know you. I had the pleasure of meeting you at Potsdam."

"What were you doing there?" one of the generals said bluntly. Clive raised his eyebrows. "I don't think Sir Winston would

care for me to say. Not yet at any rate."

"Now listen," Mr. Smith said. "We're in a perilous mess. Our problem is to get your young master to sell us the moon. What do you suggest we do?"

"He is in a highly nervous state," Clive said thoughtfully. "I think our best chance would be to work through his erstwhile fiancee. She has a remarkably calming effect on him.

"Well, get in touch with her then."

"But another problem presents itself," Clive said judicially. "The master surely won't leave the men's bar, and his fiancee certainly can't get into the men's bar."

"Why that's nonsense," Mr. Smith said. "They'll make an exception under these circumstances. Where's your phone?"

"In the foyer, sir. But I'm not too sanguine about the matter. It would be most unusual for a woman to enter the men's bar."

"We'll see about that," Mr. Smith said grimly.

He got the club's number from Clive and was on the phone for a good ten minutes. When he returned to the drawing room he was pale and shaken. "They will not make an exception," he said hoarsely. "I explained that it was imperative to the safety of the country, but the idiot I talked with didn't give a tinker's damn. He was most courteous, but absolutely adamant. Claimed that half the members had strokes once when a female *cat* wandered accidentally into the men's bar from the kitchen."

"We'll have to call the White House," one of the generals said, wincing visibly.

"That might help," Clive said,

"No, No, Smithers! I said get me Rosenbaum!"

none too hopefully. "It's worth a try, at least. He's a member, after all."

At eight-thirty that same evening two stout members of Reggie's club were carried out the main entrance to waiting ambulances. A group of men in the main lounge stood clenching their drinks with trembling hands, and talking to one another in hoarse, incredulous voices.

When the unbelievable happened — when Sari walked lightly past them and disappeared into the men's lounge — a strong old codger burst into helpless tears and had to be escorted to a chair . . .

Sari found Reggie sipping a drink in mournful and solitary splendor.

"I say, what are you doing here?" he said.

"I wanted to talk to you."

"Have a drink? Kind of quiet here tonight. Usually a good bunch around. Slack season, I suppose?"

"Reggie, I was an absolute stinker about the moon."

"I thought you were a little grim," Reggie said. "Seemed like an awfully good idea though. Buy old Sari the moon." He shook his head sadly and sighed. "Not a good idea though."

"Really Reggie, I was a stinker. It was sweet to think of me."

Reggie brightened. "Very decent of you to say so," he said. "Not mad anymore, eh?"

"No, I'm not mad, Reggie," Sari said, and kissed him on the cheek. "But I want you to sell it to some friends of mine. For just what you paid for it. Will you do that?"

Reggie looked at her closely. The dear girl had got madly off the tracks, he realized. Potty as a loon. "Anything you say," he said. This, he knew, was the time to strike. While she was completely out of her mind. "Marry me tonight?"

"Certainly, I will," she said, and kissed him on the lips.

"Let's go," he said happily. At the door of the lounge he paused and glanced about the empty room. "You've never been in here with me, have you?" he asked, struck by this coincidence. "Can't imagine why. It's a restful spot." Then he remembered that he hadn't signed his chit. "A moment, old girl," he said, and hurried to the bar.

"Check, please," he said.

"It's on the house, sir," the bartender said. "The *White* House."

"Queer business," Reggie muttered. He didn't even *know* the chap, he reflected. Well, that's how friendships started, probably. Bloke bought a bloke a drink, and pretty soon they were boon buddies. He and Ferdie would have to stop off at Washington one day.

by Naille Wilde

# ANYTHING TO DECLARE?

*Irish science-fiction has been written before — most of it sounding as though done by a Swede from Kansas City. But this one not only is a good story, it has the lilt of County Cork in every line!*

IT MIGHT well be that you've heard of Killalee, save the name. A small village in Kerry, so it is, but twenty or more years back Tiamas O'Sheehan left there to sail the seas and end up a garda in New York. And there he is with a big wife and seven children, banging his boots around the 23rd Precinct, whatever that may be. So if you're a Yank 'tis very likely you've met Tiamas and equally probable that you know about Killalee because he's sure to have told you, him being a real prince of a boy from that part of the grand green Isle.

As you have heard, Killalee overlooks Roaringwater Bay and is not more than ten strong spits from Skibbereen where the railway steams twice a day. And by reason of the same it is much liked as a landing-place at dead of night for schooners and smacks wishful to unload various articles of merchandise from France and Spain. These activities are not esteemed by authorities up in Dublin because of the coincidence of all such imports being heavily dutiable, especially the stuff in

bottles, therefore they maintain a squad of interfering coastguards and revenuers one of whom is always sitting outside Cooney's shebeen in Killalee with his big ears stretched wide.

I'll tell you now: it happens that early one morning Willy Cafferty is perambulating on the beach and feeling broodier than a stale hen. This is because he is clothed and paid by the Inland Revenue Department which asks nothing in return save blood and sweat and tears. So all night long Willy has hung around the beach awaiting a consignment of cognac and liquers due to be dumped at 2.30. a.m., if gossip in a certain bar was to be believed. But no such load has turned up, reason being that while he was blowing through cold hands and reciting the calendar of saints the stuff was being dragged ashore near Waterville and right now being trucked through Cahirciveen.

This is not the first time Willy has been persuaded to cool his official behind on the wrong beach, nor by the grace of God will it be the last because there are good men in Kerry. To make matters worse, of late a small airyplane had developed the habit of zooming over Killalee at irregular and indecent hours, dipping low when it reached the hills and quickly disappearing out to sea. Rumor insisted that certain Corkmen knew about this, they having a financial interest in the procedure, which was likely enough because no Corkman is going to be mulcted of a shilling by any Dubliners if it can be avoided by Corkish dexterity.

All these things combined to put Willy in a mulish mood. He thought of the missing boat and was minded that Fingal himself could not be in forty places at one and the same time. He thought of the airyplane and the dismal fact that a complete library of rules and regulations cannot enable a man to leap five thousand feet into the clouds. He scowled as he awaited his relief in the shape of one Patrick Michael Tulloch who'd been lying warm abed all night and could be relied upon to arrive not less than one hour late.

Therefore he was in no humor to convert himself into a one-man version of Fogra Failte — the Irish Welcome Committee — when a shiny thing whipped out of the dawn-lit sky and landed almost at his feet. It was an airyplane, of course. Any fool could see that. A mighty queer one too. As round as a meat plate, maybe thirty feet in diameter and twice the height of a man.

Probably a flying saucer. There were plenty of such around. The papers said so in clear print and the *Dublin Opinion* cartooned

them almost every issue. Any man with a mind fit for thought knew that said machines were being manufactured by somebody who saw no reason to talk. Perhaps the Yanks or the Rushins. Foreigners, anyway.

A small door opened in the top of this contraption and a man stuck his head out.

"God bless you and it's a beautiful morning," he said to Willy.

"The saints bring it along quick," said Willy, "because I've been waiting for it long enough, so I have. And where might you be from?"

"Gisalda," informed the other. He climbed out the door, slid across the polished top surface, reached the ground. It could be related in his favor that he was wearing a bright green suit.

"And that could be a far place?" Willy prompted.

"It's up there." The visitor pointed skyward, went on pleasantly, "My name is Flarti."

"There's a good ould Irish name, ' admitted Willy. "All the same, I'm thinking you don't have the true brogue because you're speaking it like a stage Englishman."

"You must excuse the accent," said Flarti, politely. "Some of us have managed to learn your commonest language by long study of your radio emissions. It was rather difficult."

" 'Twould have been easier here in Kerry where they speak it like singing birds," Willy pointed out.

"Of course, of course. But we did not wish to make contact until circumstances became propitious." He sighed in the manner of one who has been compelled to wait too long. "The time has now arrived, we believe."

That did not fill Willy's heart with sympathy. He had done a deal of futile waiting himself and the moment for the appearance of Patrick Michael Tulloch was overdue. Besides, to state that one has come out of the sky is merely to voice the self-evident. Every airyplane comes out of the sky.

"What have you got to declare?" he asked, professionally planting the hard, cold eye.

"Quite a lot," said Flarti, singularly devoid of common shame. "It will shake the world. The question is when, where and to whom we had best declare it."

"Sure and you'll confess to no other than me," said Willy. "Me being standing here for that purpose."

Flarti looked doubtful. "And what happens then?"

"I'll assess the duty and you'll pay."

"Pay?" Flarti's eyebrows shot up to his hair. "Pay what? Why should we pay anything? Do you

seriously mean to say that when for the first time in your history you have —"

"Now let's be having no blarney," interrupted Willy. "Me being too old to be moved by the same, young that I am."

"I don't understand."

"They never do, indeed they don't," assured Willy. "Especially when they've a German camera hiding in a backside pocket." He jerked a meaningful thumb at the ship. "You're caught red-handed and might as well own up to what you've got. We'll be searching that contraption anyway."

"Searching it?" Flarti was aghast. "You can't do that!"

"For why?"

"We cannot permit it."

"That's what you think," said Willy. "This saucer of yours will be impounded until all dues are paid. Get awkward with me and I'll call the gardai. I know my duty and bad cess to the man who argues it."

"In the name of the stars, why should we pay merely for arriving here?"

"Because it's the law."

"But we know nothing of your laws."

"You will," promised Willy, darkly.

Flarti took a dim view of that. He gazed at the other with unconcealed incredulity then drew a deep breath.

"This is impossible. You do not appear to realize that we are not impromptu tourists from another country. We are an official deputation from a distant star."

"And so you might be," indorsed Willy with a touch of cynicism. "Particularly if you've been opening a few bottles on the way here. I am minded of the time the excise-cutter found the Moran boys laid out in a skiff off Clear Island like they'd been readied for their wake. And a right wonderful tale they told of how —"

"I am not at all interested in other individuals' predicaments," said Flarti, showing a mite of impatience. "The issue is this: we have landed here because obviously we must land somewhere if we're coming at all."

"That's right enough," agreed Willy.

"And now we wish to make our declaration in the quarter where it will be the most effective."

"This is worse than arguing with Mawhinney's Ghost, the saints give it peace," said Willy. "I've told you until I'm sick of the noise, that assessment of duty is done by me and myself too."

"You and who else?" asked Flarti, staring around.

"There you go again," said Willy, raising his voice. "Is it a

half-wit you think I am? Do you open that contraption for lawful examination or do you not?"

"We are allowing nobody to inspect the ship," asserted Flarti. "The time is not yet for giving away secrets."

"Then I'll have to report you and the consequences be on your own head."

Strangely enough this did not bother Flarti. On the contrary he appeared to view the threat as a useful idea.

"To whom will we be reported?" he inquired, hopefully.

"To Tim Maguire in Skibbereen."

"And is he an important person?"

"That he is! He's area supervisor of Customs and Excise."

It baffled the other but sounded good. He said, "All right. You tell this Maguire."

"And so I will," said Willy. He turned, hurried along the beach, mounted a sandhill, entered the coastguard hut on top.

Picking up the telephone he waited a full ten minutes before a weary voice responded with, "Coastguard headquarters."

"This is Willy," he informed, lips close to the mouthpiece. "Switch me through to Customs and let it be fast."

"Wait now," ordered the voice. "As you are well aware, Mr. Cafferty, the Customs open at ten, God save their souls. Bare on seven it is now and no more."

"Is it that you are telling me, Padraic O'Toole?" shouted Willy. "And me standing here with a watch in my pocket."

"Then in heaven's name how can I let you talk to an empty office? It mightn't be that you've been sampling a drop of the real stuff, would it now?"

"Put me through to Tim's house," said Willy, ignoring this suggestion.

"There's a right dirty trick to play on a good Christian," reproved Mr. O'Toole. "Calling him out at bare seven and no more."

"Listen to me!" bawled Willy, getting colorful in the face. "If you have it in mind to obstruct an officer in the execution of his duty —"

"Hold your breath a bit," advised Mr. O'Toole. "I am ringing Tim and can't hear a word for your ungodly howling."

Willy composed himself and shut up. He felt a touch at his back, turned his head, found Flarti standing there.

"H'm! A rather primitive mode of communication," offered Flarti, eyeing the telephone. "Have you reported us yet?"

"I have not," said Willy. "And for the reason that I am afflicted with an O'Toole at the other end, which same means that a man must wait to the crack of

doom before —"

"The top of the morning to you, Mr. Maguire," said Padriac's voice suddenly. " 'Tis a bad hour to have Willy Cafferty on the line and moaning like a sick calf. Are you wishful for a fair word with him?"

"That I am not," snapped Mr. Maguire. "But you had better put him through. What is it, Willy?"

"There's a clut of strangers on the beach," informed Willy. "With a saucer."

"A what?"

"One of them flying saucer things. They declare nothing and refuse examination."

"Tell them it's impounded," advised Mr. Maguire.

"Your contraption is confiscated," Willy told Flarti.

"No it isn't," Flarti contradicted.

"And why might it not be?" roared Mr. Maguire who had overheard this defiance. His voice ricochetted around the small hut.

"Because," said Flarti to the telephone, "we can take off when we please and nobody can stop us."

"Where's Tulloch?" shouted Maguire, seeking reinforcements.

"Now there's a sweet mystery," Willy gave back. "I am here by myself, so I am."

"Let me speak to that clever feller I heard talking," said Maguire.

Willy handed the phone to Flarti.

"Are you the boy with the saucer?" Maguire demanded.

"One of them," Flarti conceded. "There are ten people on board."

"Sure and it's nothing to do with us if there are a hundred or a thousand. All we're concerned with are forbidden imports and dutiable goods. Now why can't you behave like decent citizens, let Willy look at what you've got, and pay what honest men should pay?"

"We do not intend to pay anything for anything," said Flarti. "Neither do we see any reason why we should."

"That means you've a right good dollop of contraband under the hatches," observed Maguire, shrewdly. "Otherwise you'd have no fair cause to object. So you thought you were on the pig's back — until you found Willy waiting for you."

"He did, to," put in Willy, fervently.

"The law is going to be enforced around here," continued Maguire, sternly official, "until I drop dead, if it's the last thing I do."

"How?" inquired Flarti, displaying interest.

"What's your name?" asked Maguire, avoiding this question pending an effective answer.

"Flarti."

"And a mighty fine name that is too. Now a man with a name like Flaherty wouldn't be after defying the law of his poor ould mother's country, would he? He wouldn't spit on the very sod from which his father came, would he?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Flarti, completely unmoved. "We do not consider ourselves subject to your laws. I have repeatedly told your man here that we come from a distant star."

"Saints preserve us!" said Maguire. "Can't you understand it doesn't matter if you come from the moon, daft as that may be. The trouble is where you've come *to* and what you've brought with you."

"We have brought recorded information of great value to your planet."

"Books?"

"You could call them that."

"Books are subject to censorship," Maguire informed. "Objectionable material is liable to seizure and destruction."

"You will seize nothing," said Flarti, becoming tough. "You will accept what we see fit to give you."

"There now, listen to the man! A real first-class hooley he is asking for this day!"

"Before you're tempted to make any trouble," advised Flarti, coldly, "I suggest you consult your superiors lest it be grievous trouble for yourself."

"Are you threatening me?" demanded Maguire, boosting his blood-pressure through the line.

"We have not covered many light-years merely to distribute childish threats. We have come in peace and friendship believing that we would be made welcome."

"And so you are," said Maguire swiftly reacting to this appeal for hospitality. "No man called Flaherty could find a better place. But first you must conform to the law." He paused, torn between sentimental desire to make the wanderer at home and the legal requirement to skin him. "Put Willy on again."

To Willy he said, "I'm going to consult the higher ones in Cork about this. You keep those boys gossiping while I get dressed. Bedad, I'm here in my night-shirt with feet perishing cold."

Willy racked the phone moodily.

"Well, what's happening now?" asked Flarti.

"He's reporting you to the Cork office."

"High time," said Flarti. "If it gets results. How often do we have to be reported before we find someone qualified to deal with us?"

"That depends," said Willy.

"On what?"

"On who's out of bed and who's willing to make a decision and accept responsibility for it."

"You seem to think nobody is likely to decide anything."

"Where did you say you came from?"

"Gisalda."

"And might it be that you have no civil servants there?"

"We have no servants of any sort. It is a free world."

"So's this one — within reasonable limits," Willy countered. "But if you can't understand the civil service no words of mine can make you. It is a fearsome subject around these parts."

They sat in silence awhile. Half a dozen men came out of the saucer, all clad in the same green. They strolled along the beach, examining shells and pebbles. The bell shrilled in the hut. Willy got up stiff-legged and answered.

"This is an evil day by the smell of it," greeted Maguire. "Terence Larkin and no less a man says that they can't evade customs inspection unless they hold documents of diplomatic immunity and the same holds good even if they've flown straight in from Rome. Now I don't suppose you thought to ask for such papers?"

"I will ask this moment." Willy put it to Flarti, turned back to the phone. "This Flaherty has what he calls an identification-plate. It's a bit of metal scratched with marks like broken match-sticks."

"No consular stamp thereon?"

"There is not."

"It won't do." A long period of ruminative quietness followed before he ventured, "Willy, they won't be a band of dressed-up tinkers trying to outwit the law?"

"Not at all at all," returned Willy, emphatically. "They have this flying thing and I can see it with my own two eyes. They wear green uniforms that'd be a credit to the I.R.A. And they're clean."

"I'll call Dublin," decided Maguire uneasily. "It is a hell of a thing when a man has to call Dublin before the milk is out of the cows."

He went off. Willy came back to his resting place, squatted on the sand and said, "Now they're reporting you to Dublin. A rare lot of trouble you're causing, so you are."

Flarti said nothing. He gloomed at the sea and seemed deep in thought. A figure tramped along the narrow path leading to the hut, came over the sandhills, stopped and gaped at the saucer.

"Here's a sweet time for a man to turn up," said Willy, ostentatiously consulting his watch.

"Why should I strain my legs and me with the rheumatics real bad?" retorted Patrick Michael Tulloch. "Moreover there is time enough. Nothing ever happens."

In view of the circumstances this last comment struck Willy

as remarkably inappropriate. Flarti's expression suggested that some secret thought had now found confirmation.

"Nothing happens to any man lucky enough to be stuck on day-shift," informed Willy with considerable sarcasm. "And if a sickly man like yourself had been on night-shift we'd have burned a pound of candles around you five years back."

Patrick flung down his cap. "You might care to kick that a yard, Mr. Cafferty, and for all the agony in my legs I'll show you who's best man."

"God in heaven forbid that I should break the skull of an invalid," said Willy with great piety.

"Kick that cap, you son of a Galway tinker," ordered Patrick.

"There now," said Willy, getting up and removing his jacket. "He's spit on my mother's grave, God bless the beautiful woman."

He squared up just as Patrick larruped him over the right ear. Startled by this sudden turn of affairs, Flarti drew a thin metal pencil from his breast pocket, pointed it, pressed the tip. Both combatants went rigid just as Willy was about to land a hay-maker.

For a moment both swayed as they strove in vain to let go at each other. Their faces purpled with effort. Flarti reclined at ease on the sand and watched them.

After a while, he said, "You can stay fixed that way until the crack of doom unless you're willing to behave."

The paralysis did not prevent them from speaking. They put in five minutes of mutual glowering with frequent swayings and strainings. Finally, Willy spoke.

"Lord have mercy and get me out of this."

"Me, too," contributed Patrick. "I am frozen inside my suit like the boys in Murphy's window."

Flarti aimed the pencil.

They relaxed, indulged a few underbreath mutterings, resumed caps and jackets. The bell sounded in the hut.

"That's for me," said Patrick, starting off.

"It is not," contradicted Willy, getting ahead fast and confronting him. " 'Tis himself calling me and I'll thank you, Mr. Tulloch, to mind your own business."

"Unless the sun thinks it's the moon," said Patrick, "this is the day-shift and you're off duty."

"I would have you know, Mr. Tulloch, that I'm off when I say I'm off and on when I say I'm on."

The bell yelled impatiently.

"And since when were you given an office in Dublin to say when one man is off and another is on?" Patrick demanded.

"It's yourself that asks me

when you can't tell the time?"

"I am on when I get here the same as you're on when you get here."

The bell screamed bloody murder.

"And when I get here it's at the proper hour," informed Willy. "Your laying-out is the only thing you'll be early for by the way you're carrying on."

"I'll be laid out like a Christian, may it be a far day," asserted Patrick. "Whereas the Widow Cafferty, heaven save her, is going to have a pitiful time disguising a hairy-faced heathen."

"That will do me," said Willy, whipping off his cap.

Profiting from recent experience Flarti used the pencil again. Then he went to the hut and answered the phone.

"Is that you, Willy?" asked Maguire.

"This is Flarti."

"Is it now? And where might Willy have gone to?" The voice carried suspicion.

"He is outside maintaining an aggressive attitude. I will get him for you."

Returning to the statues, Flarti released them, said to Willy, "He wishes to speak to you."

"What did I tell you?" Bathing Patrick with scorn, he climbed to the hut, grabbed the phone. "What is it now?"

"A right devilish dressing-down I brought upon myself from Dublin. A fellow there can quote books without so much as looking at them. It is not shortage of breath that will ever make him die and I'm telling you that myself."

"What has he told you then?"

"He says entrants pay dues unless bearing certificates of exemption issued only to the diplomatic services. He says entrants is a plain, straight word meaning anyone from anywhere, heaven or earth or the waters under the earth. And, bedad, that is that."

"All morning I've been telling them the same," said Willy, "but they won't take it."

"Is Tulloch there?"

"He is, bad cess to him."

"That makes two of you. We've six here. How many of these foreigners are there?"

"Eleven by the count. One outside and ten around the saucer."

"Do you think they are likely to resist any attempt to seize that thing of theirs?"

"You can put all your money on that and lose it like you did the day of the Limerick races," assured Willy. "I'll tell you now: they've got weapons with them. Queer little things like wands. They've stiffened me twice already."

"Stiffened you?"

"That I was. And fixed so tight you couldn't have bent my arm into my box. Patrick Tulloch was like a corpse at the salute, may

the angels want him soon."

"Illegal importation of weapons. Violation of national sovreignty by an armed craft. And twenty other hellings we can enter against them when we get down to it. That'll find them a few years behind stone."

"Providing they can be grabbed," added Willy, aware from sad experience that this was the first essential.

"We'll see to that. I'm coming out with the others and the gardai. About twenty of us. It will take half an hour or so."

"Then I'll keep them talking awhile," said Willy.

Now hold on a piece, will you, for I'm nearing the end of this affair but it isn't quite yet. Willy sat down and yapped to Flarti with a kind of convivial desperation while the six moochers continued to explore the beach and four more came out the saucer and squatted on its top looking bored. Patrick Michael Tulloch remained by the hut listening for the telephone and blinking at the sea which by this time was sparkling under the morning sun.

Half an hour crawled by and another as well without sign of Tim Maguire, the gardai or so much as a solitary trooper with a gun. Willy became tired of keeping up the gab and his throat ached for a long drink.

"You mean to say," inquired Flarti, "that in this free world one cannot transport goods from one part to another without surrendering some of the value to those who have taken no part in the effort?"

"That is true enough," agreed Willy. "The law is the law despite all the scallywags."

"Also that a person cannot travel afar without documentary permission from both those he is leaving and those to whom he is going?"

"Well, you're at liberty to dance from here to Dublin, for instance, but not from country to country. You must have passports for that."

"Pardon me," said Flarti. "I must tell the others about this. It is of peculiar interest to them."

He got to his feet, brushed sand off his seat, walked to the saucer. The quartet sunning on its top went inside with Flarti. The wandering six came back and also went inside. The saucer lay there gleaming and silent. The beach looked very empty for sudden lack of people. Studying it, Willy developed a funny feeling like a man expecting a banshee out of a bog. He stood up, edged nearer the saucer.

Its top popped up and Flarti stuck his head out exactly as he'd done at the start.

"We have decided," he announced, "that we've been too precipitate. The time is not yet. Goodbye!"

The top went down with a loud clang. The saucer shivered.

"Now hold your horses," shouted Willy, breaking into a run. "That blamed thing is impounded and a real proper offence it is too —"

The saucer went up with such velocity that its suction lifted Willy's cap a hundred feet. The cap reached the peak of its trajectory and fell back. Willy retrieved it, rammed it on his pate, stared angrily into the sky. Nothing was to be seen; the saucer had gone as if it had never been.

He stood awhile clenching and unclenching his fingers like one seeking strength for the law's executive arm. It was bad enough for Kerry men to be up to such tricks twice a week but at least they'd give an honest Customs man a good long taste of what they'd sneaked by him. As for these fancy foreigners, they knew less of convention than they knew of the law.

A motor-cycle put-putted up the lane, stopped where sand balked it. Young Sean Dolan, local reporter for the *Cork Examiner*, jumped from its saddle, came racing to the beach with a big box camera banging and bouncing on one hip.

"Where's this saucer?" he asked, a mite breathlessly. His eyes tried to look twenty ways at once.

"And who'd be telling you about such a thing?" demanded Willy.

"Padraic O'Toole it was. I came out of that bed like a hunted hare when he said you'd caught a saucer full of Martians."

"I would take it kindly if Mr. O'Toole would keep his big gob shut," said Willy.

"And him my brother-in-law? Me with his sister to keep, bless

"That surrealist stuff bores me."

her soul? Where have you put this saucer?"

"Where's Tim Maguire?" Willy countered.

"Sure and he's fastened to the Dublin line for the rest of his natural life, may he have many years. Every time he lets go someone calls and pins him again. Dublin, London, New York and even big places like Boston are fighting for a fair word with him, me having given out the news."

"So you've given out the news?" said Willy, frowning deep disapproval.

"That I have. The *Examiner* is setting up two-inch headlines and sweating on more of the story from me. They let a bit slip to the Dublin news service knowing I'd be here first by a long piece. The C.I.E. is running a special bus from Trinity College. Aer Lingus is loading a plane with scientific fellows in London. In God's name where's this saucer because I've got to get back fast?"

"It's gone."

Willy observed with displeasure an oncoming crowd that might well be the whole of Killalee. By the time it reached the beach, he decided, the advance-guard from Skibbereen would be in sight. At the same rate half Ireland would be staring glumly at Roaringwater Bay before midday.

"Gone?" echoed Sean Dolan, getting a wild look into his face. "Gone where?"

"That," Willy pointed out with clear, unimpeachable authority, "is the concern of Customs at the other end."

Sean stared tragically like one denied salvation. He unhitched his camera, dumped it on the ground, ran to the top of a sandhill. He had a long look around, came down.

In tones of considerable strain, he said, "A long, lonely night you've had, Mr. Cafferty, but shame on you for getting the world to hold your hand with a dirty story."

"Is it a liar you are calling me?" inquired Willy.

"That I am," said Sean. "And more too."

Glancing at the mob yet four hundred yards away, Willy said with cold pleasantness, "Then I'm thinking they're not coming for nothing. I'm thinking they're going to see the power of The Law." He took off his jacket, laid it down. "You will kindly show what you mean, Mr. Dolan."

Mr. Dolan ceremoniously wiped his feet on the jacket. Both rolled up their sleeves and faced each other. Patrick Michael Tulloch rocketed out of the hut as the crowd gave a hoot and broke into a run, everyone trying to reach the ringside first.

The Law triumphed in what would have been the eleventh round had there been any rounds.

(Continued from page 94)

Halfway there, the Major pulled off the road into the thick shadows of a yucca forest. He fumbled in the catch-all and found a length of tow-chain. He drew it around the unconscious man's biceps and knotted it behind him. Then he began to roll the head and slap the hot cheeks. The man moaned.

"You're safe, Reger," the Major said. "Safe now, Reger, you're safe." He felt, rather than saw, the sudden tension which came with consciousness.

"I'm taking you back to your wife. You're safe now."

"I'll kill her. Some day I'll kill her," he mumbled. "Let me go. Why not let them get me?"

*Why?* Instead, he said, "You'll never kill her, Reger. And if you did, it would be all right. She'd rather die that way than live without you. . . . But we're going to fix that. We're going to make it so you can get mad at anyone, any time, and no one will get hurt. No matter what it takes. We owe you a lot."

Reger sat up dizzily and looked back toward the pool of light, the growls of hate at the cordon. "Everybody owes me. Why *that?*"

"Wain got a report through. Everyone on earth thought you had turned Earth over to the aliens."

"Wain's all right?"

"Dead."

"Poor Wain," Reger said gently. "He got mad. Man doesn't think right, when he gets mad."

"That's what they thought about you."

He snorted, bitterly. "I didn't *dare* get mad! That's how I could think. Didn't anyone figure that out?" He hung his head and said, "All my life I've been protecting human beings — why should I stop?" He tugged at his bonds. "You can turn me loose. I never *stay* mad."

The Major freed him, started the jeep and pulled back to the road. Reger was quite quiet until they were on the strip, when he said hoarsely, "You didn't love her enough to turn me over to that mob. You'll never have a better chance."

"Did I say I loved her?"

"One way or another."

They approached the dark jetplane. "So I didn't love her enough," growled the Major. He reached up and slapped the side of the plane. *I just loved her enough to do this.* "I brought him back," he called.

The door opened, and from the shadows she said, "I knew you would." They helped Reger in. The Major climbed in beside the pilot. "Fly," he said.

The Major thought, *She knew I would. She had faith in me, too.*

A long time later he thought, *That's something, anyway.*

*(Continued From Page 37)*

poles) and I couldn't phone because Leo wasn't here.

To go down again into the street was more than flesh could bear, but the need was stronger than the needs of flesh. And I went out into the seething symphony where all sound was vibration and all vibration was life, and I came to Leo's apartment and everything was dark.

Everything was dark except Mr. Steinway's teeth, gleaming like the tusks of elephants in forests of ebony and teak. Leo couldn't have moved Mr. Steinway from the inner room to the outer room. And he hated Chopin. He wouldn't sit there in the dark playing the *Funeral March* . . .

Mr. Steinway's teeth were spotted with little drops and they gleamed, too. And Mr. Steinway's heavy legs were wet. They brushed against me, because Mr. Steinway was rolling and rumbling towards me across the room, and he was playing and playing and telling me to look, look, look at the floor where I could see Leo dead, *really* dead, and all the power was Mr. Steinway's now, the power to play, the power to live, the power to kill . . .

Yes, it's true. I scraped the box and liberated the sulphur and released the flame and started the fire and let its roaring drown out the vibrations, drown out the voice of Mr. Steinway as he screamed and gnashed his eighty-eight teeth. I set the fire. I admit it. I killed Mr. Steinway. I admit it.

But I *didn't* kill Leo.

Why don't you ask *them? They're* burned, but *they* know! Ask the sofa. Ask the rug. Ask the pictures on the wall. *They* saw it happen. *They* know I'm not guilty.

You can do it. All you need is the ability to communicate with the vibrations. Just as I'm doing it now. See? I can hear everything they're saying, right in this room. I can understand the cot, and the walls, and the doors, and the bars and the ceiling.

I don't have anything more to say. If you don't believe me, if you won't help me, then go away. Let me just sit here and listen. Listen to the bars . . .

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